

Development of Cultural Racism and the Subsequent Effect

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Abstract. This paper focuses on the concept of cultural racism, a relatively new term that emerged after World War II. The term, which is also referred to as new racism, postmodern racism, neo-racism, and differentialist racism, generally refers to the form of racism that deems one racial group superior over another based on cultural differences, not biological differences. Biological racism believes racial superiority is determined based on physical and genetic features. The study takes an in-depth analysis of the process in which the backlash of World War II and following social movements caused the shift from biological racism to cultural racism. Cultural racism functions the same way as biological racism. Cultural stereotypes and associated identities are used as justifications for racial discrimination. In Europe, cultural racism presents itself in the form of European cultural superiority, justifying discrimination and exclusion of immigrants and refugees. In South Africa, cultural racism is used to rule under the system of Apartheid and continue anti-black racism. In the United States, cultural racism combines with stereotypical cultural stereotypes to maintain the racist status quo and hide the racial reality of the country.

Keywords: Biological Racism; Cultural Racism; Postmodern.

1. Introduction

Racism has been intertwined with humans throughout history, whether it's the massacre of the native Americans or the Atlantic slave trade. In response, countless research on the causation and effects of racism has been conducted to gain an understanding of such a persistent issue.

It is important to note that there have been many works, especially studies based on times before the post-modern period, that focus on the biology of human variations and their subsequent ties to racism. In comparison, there has been significantly less attention on the social, cultural, or historical aspects of racism.

It is simply illogical to assign all, or even most of the underlying cause of racism in modern society to biological differences. R. Perry concluded from biological research that two people in the same population differ more genetically than the difference of the collective genetic makeup between two populations [1].

Considering the war on terror and the subsequent Islamophobia, there are many comedic videos circulating the internet, where a stereotypical Arab presenting person pulls out a backpack in an airport, resulting in the people around the person screaming and running away out of fear of a terrorist attack. It is easy to conclude such humor on racism towards Arab people, but there's a more fundamental rationale embedded within these jokes: The connection and correlation made between certain practices/cultures/religions with race. In these videos, there are no indications of the Arab presenting man being a Muslim, nor are there any objective reasons for people to believe he's a terrorist. Yet, the Islamic religion and the action of terrorism are somehow tied with his biological feature, resulting in racially motivated actions of the people around him. This racism didn't stem from ideologies that considered Arabs inferior or inherently dangerous. Instead, this racism stemmed from the cultural and social assumptions/stereotypes surrounding his biological features. Racism is no longer biological, it's cultural.

Hence, the purpose of the research is to look into the cultural aspect of racism in society after World War II and examine the impact of this relatively new form of cultural racism in Europe, South Africa, and the United States.

2. The History from Biological Racism to cultural racism

It is indisputable that the history and early forms of racism started based on biological differences, whether it's body structure, skin pigments, or fingerprints. However, why did the concept of "race" stand out amongst all the other biological differences between different populations? Considering the fact that there aren't two completely identical individuals, the huge amount of differentiation between people is simply too big for any categorization to be made. Thus, humans are reduced to using broader and more general criteria to categorize different populations into separate inclusive groups [1].

These separated populations of humans, influenced by ethnocentric ideals, were under the assumption of the superiority of their own groups, and conflict arises when major interaction occurs.

Take the example of the development of racism in Europe. The term "race" was very rarely used in the context of referencing the skin color of a person before the sixteenth century. However, in the few hundred years afterward, the Age of Exploration brought the first large-scale contact between Europeans and the previously unfamiliar populations of the rest of the world: Africans, Native Americans, and Asians.

These contacts saw the emergence of racism based on biological differences, as certain races are deemed inferior in nature. Some of these notions of racial inferiority are result from religion. In the bible where Noah pronounced a curse on Ham which turned his skin black and condemned his ancestors to perpetual slavery to the descendants of Shem and Japheth, the passage was used as almost a pseudoscience proof of people with black skin are naturally inferior. The cattle slavery performed over the Atlantic Slave Trade reflected the dehumanization of black people, where they are considered to have the "flesh of beasts" and are treated as such. In South America, Christopher Columbus described the hair of the natives he encountered as that similar to "horse's tail" and "horse hair", showing the equivalence he drew between the natives and animals.

In these cases, racism purely stemmed from the notion of racial inferiority. There was no more justification than the simple assumption that certain races are superior to others, which was rooted completely in biological traits and differences.

This biological racism can be seen in many examples of attempts to maintain "race purity". In the American South under the Jim Crow laws, interracial marriage was banned due to fear of sexual contamination. Whites were simply not allowed to form sexual relations with any black people or people with African ancestry [2]. In Nazi Germany, the Nuremberg Laws of 1935 prohibited any marriage and sexual relations between Jews and Gentiles, in an attempt to maintain the purity of the Aryan race. Once again, these racist actions solely stemmed from the biological inferiority/superiority of each race.

However, in the past few decades, the concept of ethnicity started to gain more and more popularity among academic scholars. There is an important distinction between the term "ethnicity" and "race" that needs to be stressed. "Race" simply refers to the biological and genetic characteristics of certain populations, while "Ethnicity" goes beyond physical appearance and includes culture, religion, surnames, and many other aspects of different populations. This new concept is an interesting shift from the purely biological idea of race, as the concept of ethnicity, in addition to the biological concept of race, also bears resemblance to the idea of culture. It is a mix of biological/genetic and cultural factors. Some writers, such as Ashley Montagu, have advocated using "ethnic group" as a replacement for the word "race" [3].

This development of race is a significant turning point that led to racism in post-modern society, where "traditional", biological racism has disguised itself and transformed into the discrimination of culture.

The racial genocide against Jewish and other racial groups committed by the Nazis during World War II horrified the rest of the world. The sheer amount of pain and suffering Hitler and his racial superiority ideologies brought to the entire world resulted in a significant backlash against the idea of genetic superiority. The notion of a certain race is biologically and naturally superior or inferior is no longer supported by the public view, which signifies that the "old-fashioned" racism, as discussed in the previous examples from the pre-World War II time period, is no longer a "justified" reason for

unequal treatment and discrimination. In Europe, the traditional view of the white race being the chosen race/the superior race are “no longer easily sustained within mainstream ideologies and regimes of representation.” [4]. In the United States, the Civil Rights movement challenged the historical racism where black people were considered inferior by birth. Equal rights movements such as the right to vote, the right to representation, and desegregation all pushed the traditional agenda of biological racism away from public support. The passing of the 14th Amendment, which guaranteed equality to all racial groups in the United States, signified the biological form of racism was no longer acceptable in the United States.

In a larger scope, the new social movements of the 1960s, the feminist, postcolonial and postmodern discourses in the 1970s, the critical forms of popular culture in the 1980s, and the new ethnic groups challenging liberal pluralism in the 1990s all pushed for the formation of global de jure equality in the post-modern period [4].

This massive change in society and the societal perception of racial inferiority/superiority forced whites to find ways to deny or reframe the white superiority that still existed in society.

As the whites in the 1960s and 1970s weren't able to openly show their racist ideologies on biological/genetic superiority, they disguised their racist ideologies as criticism and prejudice towards cultural differences between them and other races [5][6]. Racism has adapted to the new mainstream view of the world and renewed itself in a different format. “The object of racism is no longer the individual man but a certain form of existing”, and such a “form of existing” is inherently tied to culture [7]. Researchers from the United States, Western Europe, and Australia have argued that this new form of racism has emerged and is expressed openly to deny the persistent issue of racial inequality in society [8][9][10][6][11]. This form of racism, tied with cultural differences, is a “subtle” [6], “sanitized” [12], “covert” [5][13][8], and “symbolic” [9] substitute for the globally denounced genetic/biological racism, which produces racist effects in a seemingly non-racist way.

Many researchers in Australia [14], Britain [15][12], Western Europe [5][6], and New Zealand [16] have noted in their papers about the rise of this new form of racism based on and expressed as criticism of cultural differences.

Take the example of New Zealand. Researchers Wetherell and Potter, when analyzing New Zealand's white population's view and perception of the native Māori population, claimed that “Culture discourse, therefore, now takes over some of the same tasks as race. It becomes a naturally occurring difference [...] but this time around the ‘fatal flaws’ in the Māori people do not lie in their genes but in their traditional practices, attitudes and values” [16].

Another example is the development of racism in Europe after World War II. As mentioned previously, the backlash of World War II denounced all notions of genetic superiority, hence biological racism. However, due to the width and depth of European influence through global expansion and colonization, the major part of the global mainstream culture originated from Europe. This gave Europeans the power to deem the Western and white culture as progressive and modern, while accusing non-Europeans and other racial populations as traditional and backward [17]. The stereotype of Asians eating “disgusting” food such as ants and scorpions while snails are considered a fancy dish in France is a prime example of this new form of cultural racism. In these cases, Europeans and white people are no longer viewed as racially superior, but rather, they are viewed as culturally superior.

Racism becomes cultural.

3. Social Effect of Cultural Racism

As racism transforms from biological to cultural, consequent impacts on society followed. When analysing the phenomenon of cultural racism, it is important to remember that cultural racism isn't completely independent from the “old-fashioned” biological racism. Rather, it is an evolved version of racism, the racism 2.0. Therefore, since the entire concept of cultural racism was formed to continue biological racism in a more “acceptable” way, cultural racism bears the same role as

biological racism. Just like skin colors and other biological features, culture also creates different and separated groups, which can be easily exploited and used as justification for racial discrimination.

Racial discrimination in the post-modern society is no longer based on the ideals of genetic inferiority of certain races, but rather, modern-day racism is justified under the belief that people with different cultural backgrounds and identities, especially ones from areas with different religious environments, indisputably carry cultural identities that are inherently different from each other. This process externalizes people from outside of each cultural group and deems them as “others”, “aliens”, “foreigners”, and “strangers”, putting different cultural groups in, if not opposite, vastly different positions. This process is generally aided by the creation of stereotypes of different cultural groups, such as the association of terrorism with Arabs mentioned in the introduction section of this paper. These stereotypes come together to create static and fixed cultural identities for each cultural group, making it as hard for an individual to change their cultural label as it is for them to change the color of their skin.

This process of externalization and stereotype creation justified the notion that the “deep-seated cultural differences” [18] between two cultural groups are extremely polarized, and that the two cultures would not and should not be able to mix with each other, just like the colorization of skin pigments can’t suddenly change their color.

In this case, people with different cultural labels are considered not culturally “assimilable” [19] to a society with a different culture, and it would be impossible for the prevailing culture and its people to coexist with such “deviants.” To an extent, “deviants”, who attempt to join a different society, are considered unable to adapt and integrate to a different culture and are thus considered hazards and dangers to society.

One prime example of this externalization process is the restriction on immigration in many countries. In Europe, images were evoked of British culture being ‘swamped’ by immigrants [20], thus justifying a new and more restrictive immigration policy in order to prevent the otherwise “inevitable” cultural conflict. In the United States, one of the main arguments that support more restrictive immigration policies is that many immigrants fail to learn English and adapt to the “American way”, thus necessitating more restrictions on immigration so the United States doesn’t turn into Mexico [21].

This discrimination against culture is also aided by a fear of cultural contamination. Refer back to the prominent idea of “race purity” in biological racism mentioned in the previous section. The reasoning and intention behind the illegalization of interracial marriage in the American South, as well as the ban on marriage between Jews and gentiles in Nazi Germany, are the same in nature as the attempt to maintain “cultural purity.” The fear of mixing two separate cultures and creating a hybridization, as known as “mixophobia”, perpetuates the hostility between different groups with different cultural labels.

4. Cultural racism in different Regions

4.1 Cultural Racism in Europe

One of the most classic examples of cultural racism is Europe. With the commonplace action of adopting cultural racism and somewhat anti-immigration views, researchers have argued that racist thinking in modern Europe is expressed as the belief that Europeans and European countries have a superior culture [22]. Countries such as Denmark has a discriminatory housing quota for ethnic minorities, as well as a low tolerance threshold for refugee [23]. Many European countries also lack coherent or effective anti-racist legislation, which allowed many demonstrations of its racist and discriminatory ideologies.

Europe’s racist and discriminatory actions, especially those towards immigrants and refugees, are deeply rooted in the concept of cultural racism discussed in the previous section. Immigrants are viewed as “the stranger”, inevitably perpetuating the externalization of ethnic minorities. People who look different, under cultural racism, are viewed as “others” or permanent “strangers” who can never

adapt and assimilate to the “modern” and “civilized” society of Europe due to their cultural differences [24].

The nexus question is to analyze the reasoning behind this form of cultural discrimination and cultural racism in Europe. The once relatively liberal refugee policy of many European countries, such as Sweden and Denmark, shifted significantly in the mid-1980s in response to the ongoing economic crisis and a huge surge of refugees from the Middle East. The surge resulted in a high number of refugees from Muslim countries, thus resulting in immigration being considered as “Muslim Invasion” [25]. It is important to point out that “Muslim” isn’t a race or biological identity, as it is inherently tied to religion and culture. However, this fear and hostility against Islam led to hate and aggression towards all Arab-presenting people. The concept of “Muslim Invasion”, combined with the already existing Muslim refugees in Europe and the growing anti-Muslim discourse, perpetuated a huge anti-Muslim discourse. As mentioned in previous sections, the new concept of cultural racism gave Europeans a new justification for their superiority: cultural superiority. With this ideology of cultural superiority, Muslims, along with other ethnic minorities and immigrants, were demonized and vilified. The “modern” and “civilized” Europeans were pitted against the “other”, refugees, immigrants, and ethnic minorities, who are deemed as “barbaric”, “tyrannical”, and “fundamentalist” [26]. Thus, it was “justified” for Europe to implement more restrictive and discriminatory policies, as it is “reasonable” for a culturally superior population to reject and abuse a culturally inferior population.

There is also an interesting parallel between cultural and biological racism. Just like biological racism believes that “race purity” needs to be preserved, cultural racism also creates the idea that “culture purity” needs to be preserved. In this case, cultural exchange between the “superior” white Europeans and “inferior” racial minorities is seen as cultural invasion and contamination by the “inferior culture”. The fear of Paris becoming the new Mecca creates a societal hostility towards Arab immigrants, causing discriminatory policies to keep the “superior” culture of Europe pure and safe from contamination of the “inferior” Islamic beliefs and culture. This irrational fear of cultural contamination and cultural invasion becomes another prominent part of cultural racism in Europe.

Thus, the notion of cultural superiority, which is, in essence, the same as the concept of genetic superiority, along with the fear of cultural invasion and contamination, perpetuated the belief that the “pure” and “superior” European culture is under threat from globalization, immigration, refugees, and in general, “Alien” cultures. Subsequently, discriminatory measures and actions were taken by European governments to prevent this “cultural contamination” and to preserve the “purity” of European culture, resulting in cultural racism of Europe.

4.2 Cultural Racism in South Africa

The racist situation in South Africa is a great example of the global shift from biological racism to cultural racism and its subsequent impact.

In 1948, the pro-Nazi Afrikaner nationalists rose to power. At that time, the horrors and pain caused by the Holocaust, along with global movements that called for equality, made ideologies such as genetic superiority harder and harder to articulate. Therefore, following the mainstream shift from biological racism to cultural racism, Afrikaners, such as Henrik Verwoerd, started to adopt the new idea of cultural racism in the system of apartheid: separation based on cultural differences [27]. This mindset still upholds the idea that white people and westerners are innately superior to black people and Africans, on the ground that whites are “culturally superior” and more “civilized” than blacks. This cultural superiority is combined with religious superiority. The South African government claimed Christian nationalism as the civilized religion and justified white superiority, and the black population was divided into separate “tribes” that lived on separate “homelands.” This process of creating separate “tribes” is similar to the actions of Belgium when it divided the Rwandan population into Hutus and Tutsis, which resulted in severe conflicts and the horrific Rwandan Genocide. In this case, the separation of “tribes” by the South African government purposefully divided the black population of South Africa into separate groups, which almost forced cultural labels on them as each

“tribe” is governed by their own superstitions. This notion of “tribes” further perpetuated the notion of black people being culturally inferior to white people, since Afrikaners ruled a “nation”, while Africans ruled “tribes.”

Racism changed again when the world became more and more integrated. As the system of Apartheid ended in 1990, cultural racism in South Africa became increasingly subtle to deny the continued existence of racism in South African society. Cultural stereotypes were made about black people in order to avoid the accusation of racism. Discrimination and inequality that stemmed from racism are now characterized as actions caused by “cultural differences.” The cultural differences and stereotypes, even though most are resulted from the long history of racism, are now used as criticism towards the black population in general and function as attacks towards black people, replacing straightforward racist insults.

4.3 Cultural Racism in the United States

The transformation of racism in the United States is one of the most classic examples. It is common knowledge and understanding that the United States has a long history of biological racism based on genetic superiority. As late as the 1940s, comments such as “A Negro is different from other people in that he’s an unfortunate branch of the human family who hasn’t been able to make out of himself all he is capable of” from a white newspaper editor was allowed to be spoken publicly.

However, with the de jure equality and progress gained by the Civil Rights movement since the 1960s, such forms of racism can be rarely seen in the United States. Instead, the new form of cultural racism, expressed in stereotypical claims such as “blacks have too many babies” and “Mexicans don’t care about education” [28], is used to criticize racial minorities in the country and justifies a rationale for blaming minorities for their social status.

These stereotypical “cultures”, that are currently being forced on racial minorities, cause significant difficulties in implementing policies to aid racial minorities. A huge factor in the current situation of racial minorities in the United States is the lasting impact of biological racism. Policies such as racial segregation denied many talented racial minorities from improving their life and status. And under the current social standards that inherently prioritize white cultural attributes, black people’s cultural performances are hugely devalued, causing black people to constantly “perform worse” than white people [29]. However, cultural racism, aided by stereotypical and pseudo cultures of racial groups, blames the current situation of racial minorities entirely on themselves. The residual effect of the long history of racist policies is completely ignored.

Here takes the example of the African American Population. On average, African Americans have lower levels of parental socioeconomic status and are less likely to be able to convert their education into higher occupational status [30]. In a study conducted by Jason N. Houle, the findings showed “a consistent black-white disparity in student loan debt.” On average, African American students have 51% more student loan debt than white students [31]. Furthermore, black people with high-income tend to live in poorer areas than white people with high-income [32], and even black political candidates are facing many unwillingness to vote for them [33]. This demonstrates that the current social situation is the prominent reason for the difficulty of black success in the United States, rather than the baseless “lazy” culture of African Americans. However, cultural racism paints over this reality and claims the reason that a huge portion of the black population is living in poverty is that “black people are lazy and don’t try.” This baseless and stereotypical view of the culture of racial minorities is used to deny any policy actions that are designed to specifically aid racial minorities, such as Affirmative Actions and other welfare acts.

This refusal to give more benefits and aid to racial minorities creates cyclical hardships for racial minorities. Studies had shown that around 60% of black men who didn’t have a high school education have been incarcerated at some point in their lives [34]. This resulted in the deeply rooted psyche of the “black ghetto” and “dangerous Black male” in American society, creating false stereotypes such as black people use more drugs than white people, and that all black communities are prone to drug crime [35][36][37]. This false notion of “black culture” and the results of ignored racial inequality is

further used to put more blame on African Americans, which once again denies targeted aid towards to them. This creates an endless cycle of racial minorities being blamed for racial inequality, unable to receive any aid and opportunity to improve their situation, and being blamed again for their situation.

Thus, cultural racism, along with stereotypical cultures of racial minorities, functions as a barrier that traps racial minorities in the same situation as biological racism had put them in. It is used by whites to maintain racial inequalities in the status quo and prevent any changes that will clear out some of the residual effects of historical racism. With that, cultural racism becomes a tool for whites to be racist and press down on racial minorities without being blamed for racism, and thus “barricades” whites from the United States’ racial reality [28].

5. Conclusion

The concept of racism first started as a biological notion of superiority/inferiority. Different populations with different biological features, such as skin color, all considered themselves as the superior kind, leading to a fear of “racial contamination”, resulting in many discriminatory and even violent attempts to protect the idea of “race purity.”

However, during the post-World War II period, as a backlash from the horror left by the Holocaust in World War II, many social movements became prominent. Under waves of social movements and transformations, biological racism was denounced by the mainstream ideology and genetic superiority is no longer a valid justification for racial discrimination. As a response to the situation, western society shifted to using cultural differences between each population, creating a more “subtle” and “sanitized” alternative to continue the previous racial discrimination.

Cultural racism functions the same way as biological racism. Cultural identities are fixed on many racial groups and are used to justify exclusion and discrimination in an attempt to prevent cultural conflict and maintain cultural purity. Individuals are seen as unable to adapt to different cultures, just like individuals can’t change their skin color. In Europe, cultural racism presents itself in the form of European cultural superiority, justifying discrimination and exclusion of immigrants and refugees. In South Africa, cultural racism is used to rule under the system of Apartheid and continue anti-black racism. In the United States, cultural racism combines with stereotypical cultural stereotypes to maintain the racist status quo and hide the racial reality of the country.

However, it is important to recognize that the analysis and research on cultural racism are not close to being complete. There are many criticisms of the concept of “cultural racism”. Many argue that many examples used in “cultural racism” research are simply cases of culturalism, which is a concept of culture being the main force that shapes human affairs. It is undeniable that the current understanding of cultural racism and culturalism creates many gray areas and overlapping of the two concepts, requiring a further study on the relation and distinction between the two concepts. Historian and anti-racist activist George M. Fredrickson also concluded from his historical analysis that devaluations and discrimination of certain religion is a separate concept with racism [2], thus requiring further data analysis and research to rationalize the relation between the two concepts.

Additionally, cultural racism isn’t the only factor behind social phenomena and situations. Individual factors and contextual situations are all causes of the presented situation. When analysing situations such as academia and education, factors such as gender, political view, area of interest, and many other factors are all independent variables that affect studies’ outcomes and results. Therefore, future studies should avoid the conventional approach of viewing race and culture as the only independent variables in a situation, and include other independent factors as well [38].

It should also be pointed out that this paper only took a focus on situations of a few racial groups, and didn’t examine the situations of groups such as Indigenous people in the United States. It is important to recognize that cultural racism’s effect on Indigenous people also needs to be analysed and considered as part of the overall concept of cultural racism. Just as James V. Fenelon wrote in

his critique of Bonilla-Silva's work, future research needs to "expand these analyses" and include perspectives of Indigenous studies [39].

Furthermore, as biological racism has not disappeared completely, it is important to do further research on the balance between biological and cultural racism in the current world and analyze the reason for the remaining biological racism. In case of suggestions of methods to resolve the current issue of cultural racism, researchers should predict and consider the possibility of the formation of a new kind of racism, just like the formation of cultural racism as a replacement for biological racism.

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