Race and Class: The Rise of Racial Classism through Ideologies

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Abstract·

There is some research ambiguity about the original union of classism with racism. Some authors suppose that classism is simply an intersection of oppression, either linked to racism or only expressed as another discrimination segment. On the other hand, other authors suppose that the Enlightenment profoundly determines classism as a historical process, and in turn, it sedimented certain forms of racism. Our proposal maintains that classism is fully linked to racism since the beginning of the 19th century. Likewise, it is argued that racism is a cultural construction whose objective is to reinforce the difference between the Self / other as an anthropological medium. The research's central hypothesis suggests that the ideas of "race" and "class" must be analyzed from their close relationship since the 19th century. The limits of our proposal are in consideration of classism as a "stable" cultural construction. Given the contemporary historical situation, a pure epistemological research would be unsatisfactory when classism is statically analyzed.

Keywords: Colonialism, Enlightenment, racism, social classes, social construction.

1. Introduction

During the past century, academic research assumed that the historiography of *modern* racism was mainly determined by Colonialism. Much of the historiographical analysis of racism assumed that Modernity, as a historical period, had brought Colonialism since about the 16th century. Based on this view, it was concluded that Colonialism, as a European form of economic and political expansion, changed the elemental forms of racialization. Before the fledgling colonial expansionism of the 16th century, racial prejudice was defined in Latín by the word *suboles* (descent), which includes ideas about design, lineage, and ability. Commonly, all the social articulation relative to descent was supported by Christianity and its worship's moral ideals.

This orientation formed the Postcolonial Model of interpretation of racism (Césaire, 1950; Fanon, 1952; Memmi, 1957; Said, 1978), an explanatory direction continued by the founders themselves (Fanon, 1961; Memmi, 1968; Césaire, 1969; Said, 1993). Generally, no academic orientation rejected the immense implications of colonialism on modern racism. However, our proposal maintains that classism was used by European moral expansionism similar to territorial colonial expansionism.

The crucial problem with the Postcolonial Model was its extreme determination about a historical process. The Model explains racism as a consequence of colonialism — or at least extraordinarily determined by its nature. Its paradigmatic principles centrally confront "the European" and "the non-European" as two different realities, which emphasizes Eurocentrism's ideal existence and places the roots of racism in the West's expansive tendencies over the non-Western economic peripheries. Thereby, the Model presents static explanatory tendencies when considering that European values primarily tend to expand principles such as "freedom," "government," or "secularization" inevitably to the non-European. (Wu, 2013; Lloyd y Wolfe, 2016; Davis et al., 2017.)

2. Between colonial and modern racism

The difference between colonial racism and modern racism is purely conceptual. Regarding the dates of their origin, Colonialism and Modernity have a similar and even symmetrical historical beginning — depending on the historiography used by different authors. The tendency to align colonialism and racism has generated assumptions about the former as the latter's cause. This circumstance has caused other types of explanatory trends to have been subsumed within it. The most relevant among them has been classism during the Late modern period in the XIX century. In fact, racial classism determined in many ways the ideas held about late colonization. As has been shown, Feudalism did not end in the 15th century (Wolf, 2010; Hicks, 2013; Bloch, 1962/2014). The medieval principles regarding segregation continued centuries later mainly within forms of political repression. However, urbanism, commerce, and industrialization gave rise to the need to use the idea of "social class" as a concept about the cultural concentration of ideas. The social value was reconsidered between the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries when

the demographic explosion caused the reduction of the ideal and close hierarchies. Then, from Late modern período, classic denominations such as caste, estates, rank, or order were gradually abandoned. Classism, as a "natural" emanation from the birth of ideologies at the beginning of the 19th century, brought the status as a social measure concerning access to property and wages. Racism — a non-existent concept at that time — was then based on work occupation, access to culture, and indications about the descendants.

3.   Ideological racism and social classes

The Enlightenment has historically been reified as a closed process. This fact has led to the occasional perception that there is a single type of racism associated with their classist values. However, it was not the Enlightenment (c.1715-1789) but the social classes — born at the same time as ideologies in the early nineteenth century — what was used for political-economic purposes that determined ideological forms of discrimination. The use of different ideological forms for political purposes was denounced by different authors in the late 1960s and during the 1970s (Habermas, 1968; Althusser, 1970; Laclau, 1977.) In subsequent decades, for his part, the classism behind the enlightened ideals was, in fact, outlined by various authors (Mosse, 1978; Poliakov, 1982; Todorov, 1985.) The cultural phenomena typical of Europeanism at the end of the 18th century shaped the modern forms of discrimination and racial segregation. The Czech scholar Kurt Lenk proposed that ideologies were born during the second Renaissance. The medieval European bourgeoisie, as an organized class, collapsed and sought ways to emancipate themselves from the aristocracy and clergy. According to Lenk, the elites used massive and systematic methods of reproducing ideas for the first time in history (Lenk, 1961.)

Enlightenment ideals functioned as a useful tool of control for the late medieval European bourgeoisie since the beginning of the 19th century. They always acted as a shaping element of social classes. The scholar on racism Oliver Cox — who still used the analytical framework of race relations in his time — warned in the middle of the 20th century of a new social "super phase" of oppression within racial antagonisms. Cox theorized about the new orientation of race relations, but for our research interests, he outlined a new meaning for the concept of «social class» (Cox, 1945, 1948, 1950). There has been exhaustive research on the nature of social classes. Many studies have reconsidered its significance and implications in modern times (Sørensen, 2005; Weininger, 2005; Wright, 2005.) However, the emergence of social classes can be seen as a new mechanism of social division that goes from small to extended societies. Given the elites' needs, ideological racism can be considered to have emerged in the late 18th and early 19th centuries. This type of discrimination is characterized by not expressing itself communicatively and culturally in a direct way. Their expressions are channeled into social phenomena such as nationalism, aesthetics, scientism, imperialism, or literature. This situation constitutes an anomaly in its analysis and problematization since the ideals are studied as causes (e.g. aesthetics ideals from the Enlightenment are frequently not taken as an ideological consequence). The simple fact of creating and categorizing social classes responds to a need. In this way, the conceptual consideration of contemporary racism has generally been investigated from secondary analytical presuppositions, ideas that exposed its material organization through modern cultural life.

4.   Correlation between race and classes

The correlation between races and social classes responds to ideological needs of different times. Social classes have historically been constructed for two purposes. The first objective has been to contrast social strata. The idea of "social class" as well as all its connotations are aimed at determining moral, behavioral, and cultural rules through opposition. This contrast facilitates stereotypes within human interaction. The second objective of the social classes has been to reinforce their own privileges. The privileged classes, traditionally called "ruling classes," were classified as "elites" by the French sociologist Vilfredo Pareto at the end of the 19th century. Racial classism constituted a systematic form of racism exercised by those classes. This kind of discrimination was both an inter-European and external cultural artifact. For example, within the borders of Europe in the 18th century, internal anti-Semitic principles existed in Bohemia, Prussia, and Poland. These principles used to be associated with historical ideals rooted in European society and their own experiences. However, at the same time, external racial classism was related to standards about virtue and manifest destiny and served to "identify" and "order" the position in the world of different societies, both colonized and non-colonized. Classism always identified the "human races" with principles relating to evangelism, conversion, commerce, and culture before the 19th century. Social classes, in turn (from this century on), were consistently correlated with ideological interests, which emanated from the so-called ideological "families" or "traditions." For example, Conservatism — whose modern foundation appears in Europe during the Enlightenment and is attributed to Edmund Burke — left behind political assumptions about social order, evil and the *ancien régime* that always survived within social classes. Liberalism — whose foundation appears with John Locke's insights in the seventeenth century — offered ideas about obligations to the common good and private autonomy. Republicanism rested its principles on criticism of tyranny, monarchies, and populism. And socialism, for its part, tends to criticize the economy and domination. All these "families" held, implicitly or openly, ideals about the position of "human races" within the world. Ideologies worked as worldviews for globalization, totalitarianism, intellectualism, and especially the nascent and nationalism.

5.   Ideology and race

Social classes were the most significant determining factor in channeling the needs of ideologies (*l' idéologie*). Ideologies categorized the social context in order to give coherence to the political models. The main problem with ideas related to ideologies was that they were exposed through political adaptations. Occasionally, ideological ideals might not be readily appreciated. The arbitrary, constructed, and manipulated nature of the "human races" developed its survival by reifying "rationality." From the 18th century, with the birth of enlightened ideas, all forms of political reproduction abandoned purely Christian ideals to embrace principles related to the social contract's partisanism. This social contract was sustained as long as the *quid pro quo* was beneficial for the latter. When the privileged social classes saw their status

threatened, the *quid pro quo* was redefined — it was not broken (relatively) until specific revolutionary processes took place. The break does not occur abruptly between the two classes but the disfavored class was divided. Such political action, in fact, always occurs through the constant subdivision of the underprivileged class. At this point, the idea of the "human race" welcomes a tremendous symbolic and moral value within social interaction and historical perceptions.

In order to generate a strict division ("strict" in its primitive form), the categories related to "human races" were based on the rational (or the standard of rationality) of the privileged classes. The reason was based on the tradition of the original "epistemology" of the so-called native, a concept associated with the reified nature of *oriundus* languages, civil history, and imagined national aesthetics. The human race embodied a "blueprint" on the traditional beliefs shared by Native societies. Before Modernity, precapitalist visions — before capitalism as a system, whose beginning is located in the XV century — commonly held historically systematized ideals. For example, anti-Semitism, as a variant of Aryanism, was appreciated in the revolts in Alexandria against the Jews in the time of Emperor Caligula (12-41) simply because the natives felt that they possessed something different. This kind of aversion was also perceived in Tacitus's Roman visions (55-120) on the barbarian Germans. Thereby, in the expulsions of Jews from the British Isles in the 13th century, and Spain, Portugal, Italy, or Bohemia during the 15th and 16th centuries. Modern racism, for its part, began to use ideologies in a socially embryonic way as a mechanism of segregation. Ideology in modern societies always rested on the normalization of authority regulations while its goals, in turn, on its reproduction possibilities. One of the characteristics of the relationship between social classes and "human races" was the large number of intersections of oppression mobilized through ideologies. Ideologies, formally were not:

just any system of ideas or beliefs but [...] historically transient exploitative forms of social organization are represented as eternal, natural, inevitable, or 'rational'. [...] are not the capricious, subjective fantasies or merely the deliberately confected lies of the direct agents of (for example) capitalist exploitation but, like all ideas, reflect and embody the actual practices and social relations proper to the social formation which they serve (Jones, 2001, p. 227.)

Indeed, the union of standardized prejudices of social classes with ideologies always channeled the nature of cultural relations between distant actors. The standard ideals have been commonly used to associate racial inferiority with the ideological orthodoxy's non-standard behavior. Class ideological principles, whose idiosyncrasy was related to racial behavior since Modernity, tended to globalize stereotypes related to the origin of disadvantaged groups (generally from social segments of the poor population or guest-workers) with the dominant ideology standard.

6.   Conclusion

As has been proposed, the main difficulty in analyzing racial expressions lies in their nature. Racial stereotypes have been used since the 18th century from an ideological perspective. In turn, ideological assumptions have emanated from cultural ideals, currents of thought, and artistic movements that emerged from the privileged classes, among which emotional

circumstances are mixed with pseudo-rational presuppositions. Historical periods such as the High Renaissance, the Age of Enlightenment or the Romanticism, and historical junctures as the Victorian sensibility, Weimar Classicism or industrialization, have been effective forms of orientation not only of behaviors but also of worldviews about difference, legitimacy, and oppression. Ideologies, among other functions, have developed strong feelings of belonging through accommodated irrational principles. Belonging, in turn, has been reinforced with political constructions that, as "layers" under ideologies, have emanated pragmatically through social interaction. Given the situation, ideologies have used racial ideals as one of the most valuable means of oppression for their purposes. Before the mid-18th century, racial ideas were not rooted within a "normative" set of collective emotions and beliefs. Different forms of transversal oppression were used in diverse racial events before the solid relationship between "race" and "class." In the 17th century, for example, the Cossack genocide of the Khmelnytsky Rebellion (1648-1654) against Polish-Lithuanians sustained intersections of oppression related to the estates and the cult. Before the mid-18th century, in the Dutch pogrom of the Batavia Massacre (1740) against the Chinese population, intersections of ethnic and territorial oppression were found. With the emergence of collectivized ideas and the utilization of public opinion by the late medieval bourgeoisie, stereotypes of broad human groups were quickly mobilized through "stimulated" sensitivity. At present, sustained cultural "false" conceptions about the nature of non-existent human races constitute a crucial element of social control. The scholars Erik J. Engstrom and Robert Huckfeldt, in their work *Race, Class, and Social Welfare*, expound as "the American working class disproportionately reflects the racial and ethnic heterogeneity of the American population;" the authors suggest that the development possibilities of political movements to uphold ideals "depends on social homogeneity to construct a politically self-conscious working-class identity," because "becomes increasingly difficult to construct a collective identity supporting unified working-class interests [...] within a racially and ethnically fragmented working class." (2020, p. 26) The present research maintains that during the birth of ideologies (early 19th century), the idea of "race" was formed in its current form. Thereby, the relationship between race and classes has been shaped by assumptions about the rationality imposed by privileged social classes. Behind the classes' implicit interests, there has frequently been found a function dedicated to the division between the Self / other — as well as the constant subdivision of the subclasses. Furthermore, the idea of "race" has shaped the moral heterogeneity necessary to deepen social disagreement, discord, and conflict between groups.

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