

## **SYNERGY BETWEEN RACIAL DIFFERENTIATION AND SOCIAL INEQUALITY IN HUMAN SOCIETIES**

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### **ABSTRACT**

*It is impossible in the present environment to ignore the role of ideas about Skin colour in shaping and determining the social and political relations of societies all over the globe. During the past two decades theoretical and political debates have raged over the status of race and racism as social and analytical concepts. There has been much debate about why the notion of race is still widely used in both popular and social scientific discourses when it is widely accepted that 'races' as such do not exist. This has reached the stage when some writers argue vehemently that the notion of 'race' must be bracket every time it appears in social scientific discussion. This paper examines skin colour and social differentiation in human society. The analysis is intended to provide the basis of a theoretical framework for analyzing contemporary form of racism and the social relations that arises on the basis of racial categorization.*

**Key words: Race, Minority group, Social Stratification, Social Differentiation, Skin Colour and Social Inequality**

### **Introduction:**

The study of race as a field of social scientific inquiry and research originated in the earlier part of the century in the work of a number of American Sociologists and Anthropologists, most notably during the 1920s and 1930s. They were influenced by the work of Robert Park, one of the key early Journalistic and Sociological writers in this field and a founder of the Chicago school of Sociology. During the period from the 1920s to the 1950s the works of these scholars helped to establish what came to be defined as the study of race relations, particularly through their studies of segregation, immigration and race consciences in the United State (Park, 1925; Stangfield, 1985, 1993).

By the early twentieth century Sociological theorizing on race in the United States encouraged the first sustained attempts to analyze the ways in which race became a relevant social category where cultural and social meanings were attached to the physical traits of a particular social group.

This in turn helped to popularize notions about the origins of racial conflicts and prejudice, which concentrated on situations of cultural contact. The emphasis in sociological studies of the 'race problem' during these decades was on the origins

of race prejudice, the interplay between prejudice and conflict, the impact of assimilation on the life of African-Americans and the processes through which racial conflicts could be mediated or overcome. These early studies of race did not concern themselves with the study of racism as a doctrine. The usage of the term racism in both political and social discourses was linked to the rise of Nazism in Germany. As the Nazis came to power and articulated and put into practice their ideas about racial superiority, the term racism came to be used to refer to ideas which defined some racial or ethnic groups as superior and others as inferior (Barzom, 1938; Barkin, 1992; Moses, 1966). This usage of the term was first suggested by Ruth Benedict in her book *Race and Racism* which defined 'racism as the dogma that one ethnic group is condemned by nature to congenital inferiority and another group is destined to congenital superiority' (1943:97). In this context racism was seen as referring to those sets of ideas that defined ethnic and racial groups on the basis of claims about biological nature and inherent superiority or ability.

In the post-1945 period a number of developments outside the United States encouraged interest in the study of race and racism in other societies. An important development in this context was the emergence of migrant labour as an important social group in many West European societies. Migration from the ex-colonies and Southern Europe led to the creation of racial and ethnic minorities in countries such as Britain, France, Germany and Holland. Another important development was the entrenchment of the Apartheid system in South Africa, a process which aroused the interest of both Social Scientists and Political activists, particularly in relation to the role of the political and legal system in enforcing racial groups.

In Britain, and other European societies, the growth in the theorization of race and racism ran parallel to these developments. There were two central concerns in these early European attempts to theorize racial and ethnic relations. First, the patterns of immigration and incorporation in the labour market of black and other ethnic communities. Second, the role of colonial history in determining popular conceptions of colour, race and ethnicity in European societies.

According to Rex's (1970) analytic model the definition of social relations between persons as race relations is encouraged by the existence of certain

structural conditions for example, frontier situations of conflict over scarce resource, indentured, or slave labour, unusually harsh class exploitation, strictly legal distinctions and occupational segregation, differential access to power and prestige, cultural diversity and limited group interaction, and migrant labour as an underclass fulfilling stigmatized roles in a metropolitan setting. From this perspective the study of race relations is concerned with situations in which such structured conditions interacted with actors definitions in such away as to produce a racially structured social reality. In the study conducted by Rex and his associates in Handsworth during the mid 1970s (Rex and Tomlinson, 1979), assert that the position of migrant workers and their children is located outside the negotiation that had taken place between the White workers and Capital. They experience discrimination in all the areas where the White workers had made significant gains, that is, employment, education and housing. It follows from this that the position of migrant workers placed them outside the working class in the position of an underclass. The concept of underclass was intended to suggest, that the minorities were systematically at a disadvantage compared with their White peers and that instead of identifying with working class culture, community and politics, they formed their own organizations and became effectively a separate under privilege class (Rex, 1979).

### **Conceptualizing Racisms**

For Miles (1988), the idea of race refers to a human construct, an ideology with regulatory power within society; analytically, race constitutes a paper tiger that may be a common term of reference within everyday discourse, but which present a serious theoretical problem. Race is thus an ideological effect, a mask which hides real economic relationships (Miles, 1988). Thus the forms of class-consciousness, which are legitimate, must ultimately be seen as the product of socio-economic relations, which are hidden within the regulatory process of racialization.

For Miles in his own words the concept of racialization refer to those instances where social relations between people have been structured by the signification of human biological characteristics in such away as to define constructed racialization which is interested with the conditions of migrant labourers. Its effects are the result of the contradiction between the need of the capitalist

world economy for the mobility of human beings and on the other hand, the drawing of territorial boundaries and the construction of citizenship as a legal category which sets boundaries for human mobility.

Racial differentiations are always heated in the context of class differentiation. Races are created with the context of political and social regulation. This race is above all a political construct. The politics of race and racism has undergone numerous transformations in recent decades; from its very origins the study of racism has been intimately connected to issues such as the rise of fascism, the holocaust and the destructive consequences of racist political mobilizations. Racism manifests itself in plural and complex forms. As a result the champions of this racism can claim that they are by no means racist but merely interested in protecting their ways of life and that the issue of colour or phenotype is irrelevant to their arguments.

In this context unitary or simplistic definition of racism becomes hard to sustain. However, it seems clear that contemporary racisms share some central features. They attempt to fix human social groups in terms of natural property of belonging within particular political and geographical contexts. Racism cannot be reduced to economic or class relations but neither can it be seen as completely autonomous from wide social relations such as gender and sexuality. This is why there is need for a more rigorous analysis of the interactions between racism and social, economic, political and cultural relations.

### **Theoretical Framework: Theory of Stratification**

All human societies from the simplest to the most complex have some form of social inequality. In particular power and prestige are unequally distributed between individuals and social groups. In many societies there are also marked differences in the distribution of wealth. It is important at this point to make a distinction between social inequality and social stratification. The term social inequality simply refers to the existence of socially created inequalities. Social stratification is a particular form of social inequality. It refers to the presence of social groups which are ranked one above the other, usually in terms of the amount of power, prestige and wealth their member possess. Those who belong to a particular group or stratum will have some awareness of common interests and a common identity. They will share a similar life style, which to

some degree will distinguish them from members of other social stratum. Members of a particular stratum have a common identity, like, interests and a similar life style. They enjoy or suffer the unequal distribution of rewards in society as members of different social groups.

It is possible for social inequality to exist without social strata. Some Sociologist suggest that social classes have been replaced by a continuous hierarchy of unequal position, where there were once classes, whose members had a consciousness of kind, a common way of life and shared interests, there is now an unbroken continuous of occupational status which command varying degrees of prestige and economic reward. Thus, it is suggested that a hierarchy of individuals has replaced a hierarchy of social groups. Although many, Sociologists use the terms social inequality and social stratification interchangeably. Many stratification systems are accompanied by beliefs which state that social inequalities are biologically based. Such beliefs are often found in systems of racial stratification.

### **Skin Colour, Slavery and Capitalism:**

It is clear that a recurrent theme in debates about the history of racism, as well as contemporary processes of racialization, is the issue of the relationship between capitalist economic expansion and exploitation and the emergence of racism and racial ideologies. Cox (1970), made reference to Eric William's book on Capitalism and Slavery, published in 1944, and which sought to locate slavery as essentially an economic phenomenon, which arose because of the need to exploit labour through coercion. In this sense Williams reacted against the argument that slavery particularly in the forms developed in the America, was essentially racial in origin and based on beliefs about racial inferiority. Rather, for William racism was a consequence, not the cause, of slavery.

Another important issue of the origins of 'race prejudice is from the period of European expansion at the end of fifteenth and beginning of the sixteenth centuries. Racism arose from the need to exploit labour in the form of slave labour. 'Race prejudice' constituted a justification for the exploitation of the labour power of certain groups of workers, and was 'a social attitude propagated

among the public by an exploitation of either the group itself or its resources or both may be justified'(Cox, 1970).

There have been historical research which tends to question the usefulness of viewing either slavery or racist ideologies from a purely economic perspective the outcome is that we now have a much more sophisticated analysis of the relationship between slavery and the process of capitalist development. A more specific account of the role of race in European expansionism is provided by Solomon (1968) classic study *White over Black* (1968).

Jordan's account is particularly interesting because of the way he manages to capture in some detail the changing representations of Africans from the sixteenth to the nineteenth centuries within the context of America. Rejecting the view that there has been a uniform and unchanging view of Africans ever since the sixteenth century, Jordan provides a systematic and richly detailed account of the representations of Africans' skin colour, religions, in relation to other human groups and sexuality. His accounts shows in some detail that the first impressions articulated by Europeans of African descend in the sixteenth century were transformed quite fundamentally by the experience of slavery and economic domination, by changing political and ideological environments and by cultural changes. The interrelationship between the institution of slavery and the social and political position of slaves was clear throughout this period. It is perhaps symptomatic of the way in which black slaves were treated as mere articles of commerce, as commodities, that the case of slave ship *Zong* could have arisen in 1781. The case arose because 131 slaves were jettisoned by the captain ostensibly on the plea that he had run out of water. He then entered an insurance claim for loss of his 'cargo'. At the trial, the issue was not about murder but whether the throwing overboard of the 131 slaves a true act of jettison for which the insurance company would have to pay but a case of fraud. According to the solicitor-general, John Lee, who defended the owners of the slaves, it would have been 'nothing less than madness' to have brought a murder charge since the slaves thrown overboard were 'property' (Walving, 1992). The black slaves was seen as not only lazy, they were lying, profligate, promiscuous, cowardly, savage, debased, ugly and demonstrably inferior to 'whites'.

The social and political environment domination and subordination appeared not only as the function of owning productive agrarian property but also as the result of a natural phenomenon. It is within this context that being black became the assumption of being slave. For the black slave, this was underscored by the pupil laws, which accorded slaves no existence in law as subjects having no ability to acquire property. They were defined as a 'thing' not a person, and could not bring a civil action for any personal injury done to them. It remained for owners to prosecute by indicating how the personal injury done to their property deprived them of or rendered less valuable, the service of their slaves.

### **Skin Colour and Social Differentiation:**

The question of what impact skin colour (racism) has on social relations has preoccupied many sociologists of race, working within a variety of theoretical paradigms. The focus of much of the empirical research on contemporary racial relations has been on the analysis of employment or on the development and impact of anti-discrimination measures. However, what is interesting about this body of work is that there are a number of questions, which need to be addressed in a fuller manner. For example, how does one account for the emergence and persistence of radicalized inequalities in employment, housing, social welfare, education, as well as evident inequalities in other areas? What can liberal democratic societies do to ensure that radicalized inequalities do not lead to the social and economic exclusion of minorities? These are some of the questions, which have been raised in one way or another by researchers and politicians, and yet we do not seem to have moved much closer towards resolving them. Rather, we have seen deeply politicized public debates both the origins and remedies for racial inequality.

Some of the features of these processes can be seen at work if we look at the changing patterns of jobs occupied by black workers in Britain in the period since the 1950s. Migrants to Britain of the 1980s came to find work primarily in those sector experiencing labour shortages. Workers from the Caribbean, India, and Pakistan were recruited for employment in foundries in the midlands, textile mills in the North, transport industries in major cities, and the health services.

In common with migrant workers across Europe, these workers experienced a high degree of exploitation, discrimination and marginalization in their economic and social lives. Despite the need for their labour, their presence aroused widespread hostility at all level, from trade union branch to government level. Employers only reluctantly recruited immigrants where there were no white workers to fill the jobs, white workers was perceived to be quite natural and legitimate- immigrant workers were seen as 'an inferior but necessary labour supply' (Brown, 1992). Over time these workers remained in a relatively restricted spectrum of occupational areas, over represented in low-paid and insecure jobs, working anti-social hours in unhealthy or dangerous environments. Although by the 1970s African-Caribbean and Asian people worked in a broader range of occupations than before, these were still jobs that were deemed fit for ethnic minority workers rather than white workers (Brown, 1992).

In 1984, the Policy Studied Institute published a major survey on the state of black people in Britain, covering housing, education and employment, showing that black people are still generally employed below their qualification and skill level, learn less than white workers in comparable job levels, and still concentrated in the same industries as they were 25 years earlier (Brown, 1992). On top of this, black people have a higher unemployment rate, which increases faster than that of the white population. Particularly badly hit are ethnic minority young people. A 1996 review of the statistic evidence reported: while employment prospects are discouraging for all young people, the evidence shows that black youth unemployment has reached astronomical proportions in some areas. The differential unemployment rates between blacks and whites are in fact generally greater for this black group than for any other. When account is taken of the fact that black people are far more unlikely to go into further education than white, we can see that young black people in the 1980s are facing a desperate situation (Newham, 1986, Solomon, 1996).

### **Skin Colour and Social Differentiation in Human Society (American Experience)**

In the America constitution there was a clear-cut distinction among the various individuals that make up the American republic. The Negro was defined as a sub-human, disfranchised part of the polity. The Indian groups with which



the settlers classed on the ever expanding frontier were first treated as alien nations who could be either enemies or allies against competing European powers, later as a nuisance and an impediment to white expansion which had to be exterminated or pushed back, still later, as shiftless beggars and irresponsible wards of the republic, and only belatedly as fellow citizens.

The democratic, egalitarian, and libertarian ideals were reconciled with slavery and genocide by restricting the definition of humanity to whites. Abraham Lincoln, who, contrary to all evidence has been immortalized as the "Great Emancipator", was offended when he was accused of abolitionism and emphatically declared in 1858 during the Lincoln- Douglas debates. "I am not, nor ever have been in favour of bringing about any way the social and political equality of the white and black races, I am not nor ever have been, in favour of making voters or jurors of Negroes, nor qualifying them to hold office. I will say in addition to this that there is a physical difference between the white and black races, which I believe, will ever forbid the two races living together on terms of social and political equality. And in as much as they cannot so live, while they do remain together, there must be the position of superior and inferior, and I as much as any other man is in favour of having the superior position assigned to the white race" (Solomon, 1996).

Apart from American Indians, the later a number of non white immigrants such as Mexicans, Puerto Ricans, Chinese and Japanese, United State Society has been divided into two major racial castes-Negroes and whites. Negroes have defined traditionally as all persons with any black African ancestry who cannot "pass" as whites. In the small World of the plantation was rigidly stratified. An elaborate etiquette of race relations regulated between master and slaves. Slave were expected to behave submissively through self-deprecatory gestures and speech, the frequent use of terms of respect toward whites, self-debasing clowning and general fulfillment of their role expectation as incompetent and backward grown-up children. White infants were breast fed and raised by black "mammies", adolescent boys often had their first sexual experience with a slave and usually continue to have Negro concubines throughout their sexually active life times.

Miscegenation in the form of concubinary between White men and Negro women was accepted and was quite frequent, particularly between house slaves and their masters. Intermarriage was outlawed in most states and sexual relations between White women and Negro men were strongly condemned, but the other form of concubine was an aspect of the general exploitation that was inherent in slavery. Negroes were regarded as immature, irresponsible, unintelligent, physically strong and musically gifted. They were treated at best like "stem but just" father who would deal with backward children, at worst like special and expressive species of live stock whose labour was to be exploited for the greatest economic gain.

Most religious denominations sought Biblical rationalizations for the "peculiar institution" and did little to encourage baptism and marriage of slaves. Stable family life among slaves was impossible, even common law unions were frequently broken up by separate sale of partners; children above infancy were often separated from their mothers and Negro women were constantly at the sexual disposal of their masters and their overseers" (Van den Berghe, 1987).

### **Skin Colour and Social Differentiation in Human Society (South African Experience)**

If racism was an endemic disease in the United States, in South Africa it was a way of life. Of all contemporary multi-racial societies, South Africa was the most complexly and rigidly stratified on the basis of race. An example was a situation in which before the collapse of apartheid, when if going to church, prosperous Dutch matrons were followed by a procession of slaves , one carrying their umbrella, another, their prayer book, a third, their foot warmer. Black South Africans were forbidden to walk in the streets with a lighted pipe or to wear shoes, for these objects were regarded as symbols of free status.

The division of labour was clearly along racial line, manual work being regarded as degrading by the whites and engaged in almost solely by slaves and Hottentots. Although, there were some white craftsmen, they were in effect unambiguously determined by race more than by any other criterion. Hottentots, although nominally free, lost both their pasture land and their cattle to the encroaching Whites and thus were soon reduced to a condition of selfdom. Free people of colour were subject to vagrancy laws and master-and servant laws,

which greatly restricted their mobility and reduced them to a state of symbiotic dependence on the Dutch settlers that differed little from slavery.

Each race has a legally defined set of privileges or disabilities. Wide differences in standard of living, formal education, health, occupation, and wages accompany the vastly unequal distribution of power. The whites retain a virtual monopoly of both power and wealth. The national electorate is entirely White, the Bicameral parliament in Cape Town is all the White, and so are the cabinet, the army, the navy, the judiciary, and all the higher positions in the civil service. South Africa is in effect a White government with an internal colonial empire in which the Africans (and increasingly the coloureds and Indians are dealt with administratively and arbitrarily without any representation on sovereign law making bodies. The Whites also monopolized the means of violence: Military service and the right to carry firearms are limited to whites. The police force uses non-whites, but does not arm them with firearms (Solomon, 1996). The principles of unequal pay for equal work has even been applied by most religious denominations in paying widely different stipends for White and African clergy men. The mean family income of White is approximately thirteen to fourteen times that of Africans and five times that of coloureds and Indians, numbering less than 20 percent of the population; the Whites earned 67 percent of the national income in 1960 (Solomon, 1996).

Government educational expenditures per White pupil are ten times those per African pupil. In the towns the Whites occupy all the better residential areas and throughout the country they enjoy a lion's share of all the public facilities.

Indeed, the reservation of separate amenities Act explicitly legalizes not only segregated facilities but also unequal ones; quite often no amenities at all are provided for non whites, thus in a park, for example, all benches are often labeled "Europeans only". All these have changed now since the collapse of apartheid in South Africa (Solomon, 1996).

## **Conclusion**

What is important in relation to the morphology of skin colour or racial ideas is that intrinsically they involve a visual ideology in which particular categories of people are classified on the basis of stereotypes, and are attributed specific social and cultural characteristics. From the very earliest stages of modern racial thinking men and women were classified in terms of physical types. The tendency to visualize the 'Other' as both different and inferior depended on the visual images, which lay at the heart of racial reasoning.

A comparison of Blacks and Whites in the USA provides an illustration of the effect of one stratification system on life chances. Blacks and certain other ethnic minority groups form the base of the stratification system. The rate of infant mortality among Blacks is twice that of Whites and the proportion of Black mothers dying during child birth is four times that of Whites, Blacks are less likely to end in separation or divorce and they are more likely to have a criminal record. Many Sociologists would see these differences in life chances as a direct consequence of social stratification base on skin colour.

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