Lecture 11
18 May 2006

Contemporary Racism, Multiculturalism

Remember

- Essay deadline: **7 June 2006**
- Select one of the proposed topics
- Follow the format and style guidelines, spell-check
- Do not plagiarise!
- Email to my university account

Contemporary racism

- no single monolithic racism but various distinct racism**s**?
- no longer an ideology about biological arguments ('classical' racism as natural)
- a new era in the history of racism began with decolonisation, decline of scientific racism, economic crisis of the industrial societies (1960s, 1970s)
- a range of characteristics employed to construct the difference – 'cultural racism'
- the need to study the role of the state and the political institutions in shaping ethnic and race relations (cf. nationalism)
- post-1989, post-socialist racism, neo-racism

Review: racism

- 1. Religious racism: biblical and theological arguments; God created white people in the 'Bible Lands' (the Caucasian race), during exodus people migrated to Asia and Africa and became non-white and they degenerated. The white race has always been and remains superior.

- 2. Biological racism: end of the 19th c. naturalistic arguments, secularisation – classical racism

- 3. Cultural racism: after WWI theory of white biological superiority slowly began losing force, though biological racism remained prevalent until the 1950s and 1960s.

Cultural racism

- Civil rights movement of the 1960s; anti-colonial, anti-racist arguments
- Theory of modernisation: non-Europeans were not inferior in their potential for achievement, but they were inferior in the level of achievement that they managed to attain. Because of their history, non-Europeans were culturally backward in comparison to Europeans. The solution proposed was that the non-Europeans should follow the European guidance and they will be able to overcome their backwardness. The argument of racial difference is thus replaced by difference in culture.

Cultural racism

- As a theory, cultural racism needs to prove the superiority of 'Europeans' (replacing 'whites')
- It claims that the development has been spread from Europe around the world: cultural and intellectual history originates from Europe; in cultural development the Europeans have always been more advanced, more progressive than non-Europeans (cultural innovations, technological and material progress, political and social traits, e.g. the state, the market, the family... – European progress)

Cultural racism

- Core: Europe & the countries of European settlement overseas, esp. the USA

- Periphery: non-European world, the Third World

- The periphery follows the European progressiveness, inventions and progress in general

- A very Eurocentric view; Europe seen as advancing more rapidly than other civilizations (in the past and now)

Cultural racism

- Present: so much racism persists but there are very few 'racists' – why?
- "racist theories are indispensable in the formation of the racist community. There is in fact no racism without theory" (Etienne Balibar)
- Cultural racism is often advocated by scholars who reject racism, are against prejudice and think of themselves as non-biased, not racist
- The belief is that cultural differences explain why some groups are backward: e.g. the Xs are poor because of their traditional culture, the Ys are unprogressive because of their religious values, etc.

New racism

(Etienne Balibar "Is There a 'Neo-Racism'?" in Balibar & Wallerstein (eds.)
Race, Nation, Class: Ambiguous Identities Verso, 1991)

- New racism is R of the era of decolonisation, the category of *immigration* becomes a substitute for the notion of race – 'racism without races'
- The dominant theme is no longer biological heredity but the (inability to overcome the) cultural differences
- New R does not seem to claim superiority of certain groups, it 'only' emphasises the damage being done by abolishing boundaries because certain life-styles and traditions are simply not compatible

New racism

(Etienne Balibar)

- New R tries to be politically correct:
- Races do not constitute isolable biological units; in reality there are no human races
- People's behaviour and their abilities cannot be explained in terms of their blood or genes, however!
- Differences are the result of people belonging to different historical 'cultures'

New racism

(Etienne Balibar)

- Culture can also function like a nature
- Culture can lock individuals and groups a priori into a genealogy – into a determination that is immutable and intangible in origin
- And if insurmountable cultural differences are our true 'natural milieu' then the abolition of that difference will necessarily produce defensive reactions and interethnic conflicts
- Such aggressive reactions are seen as natural (for example, xenophobic reactions are portrayed as natural reactions of the autochtonomous population to immigration etc.)
- New R is a theory of race relations that naturalizes racist conduct (instead of racist belonging)

New racism

(Etienne Balibar)

- If R is to be avoided, cultural distance needs to be maintained; 'tolerance thresholds' have to be respected, culturally different collectivities should be segregated, etc.

- Argument that it is anti-racism which creates racism because it 'provokes' people's national sentiment (e.g. anti affirmative action)

- Cf. contemporary Arabophobia & Islamophobia

Contemporary racism (overview)

- Cultural R involves prejudice against individuals and groups because of their culture (social customs, manners and behaviour, language, religious beliefs, morals, aesthetic values, leisure activities, dress styles, etc.)

- 'Their' culture (compared to 'ours') is seen as flawed, standing in the way of their progress, so they should turn their backs on their culture and modernise, assimilate

- No longer a belief in the biological inability to change, in fact people are encouraged to change, to become absorbed by the majority culture

Clash of civilizations

- Popularised by Samuel P. Huntington:
- 1993 article "The Clash of Civilizations" in *Foreign Affairs* & 1996 book *The Clash of Civilizations and the Remaking of World Order*
- He proposes that the "fundamental source of conflict in this new world will not be primarily ideological or primarily economic. The great divisions among humankind and the dominating source of conflict will be cultural. Nation states will remain the most powerful actors in world affairs, but the principal conflicts of global politics will occur between nations and groups of different civilizations."

Clash of civilizations

- Influential, controversial, wide response & many criticisms:
- The thesis is too simplistic, the evidence anecdotal
- It creates a self-fulfilling prophesy, differences among 'civilizations' are reasserted
- Empirical studies do not confirm that post-Cold War world saw an increase in inter-civilizational conflicts
- Too much focus on the West vs. Islam
- Responses: 2001 as the Year of Dialogue Among Civilizations (UN, see http://www.un.org/Dialogue/), 2005 Kofi Annan's initiative Alliance of Civilizations; but also re-popularisation of the thesis by recent terrorist attacks (9/11 2001, March 2004 Madrid train bombings, July 2005 London bombings, 2005 French riots & Australia's race riots, cartoons controversy, etc.)

The fact of cultural diversity

- Characteristic of most states today
- Multiculturalism is a specific response to that fact
- A separation of state and ethnicity; states refrain from granting special rights to any cultural minority
- The assumption that liberal states could and did observe a principle of ethnocultural neutrality has been dismissed as an illusion

Multiculturalism

- Multiculturalism can refer to a demographic and descriptive use; to an ideology and norms; or to a programme and policy;

- Multiculturalism can cover a range of meanings:

- Multiculturalism as an ideology;

- Multiculturalism as a discourse;

- Multiculturalism as a set of policies and practices

- Multiculturalism developed into increasingly influential political-ideological doctrine, a moral ideal

Multiculturalism

- In the last couple of decades the term 'multiculturalism' has increasingly been used to label both
- A) societies with considerable ethnic diversity; and
- B) a social philosophy that advocates the defence and celebration of such diversity
- The term is most commonly applied to states where ethnic diversity is a combined result of European colonisation and settlement, waves of labour immigration, in some cases history of slavery and ethnocide of indigenous peoples (e.g. USA, Canada, Australia)
- In comparison, post-colonial states of Africa, Asia, the Middle East are more often described as 'plural societies' (cf. J. S. Furnivall, M. G. Smith, L. Kuper)

Multiculturalism

- The reality is that the world exhibits a variety of situations, even 'ideal types' are different:

- M in Western Europe is primarily concerned with immigration from former colonies or with *Gastarbeiters*

- M in Canada has been shaped by the Quebecois claims to autonomy

- M in the US has been formed by the legacy of slavery and the black civil rights movement

Multiculturalism

- As a policy, multiculturalism emphasizes unique characteristics of different cultures

- Concrete examples of multiculturalism can be found in Canada, Sweden and Australia; M is extensively debated in the UK as well... (cf. Wieviorka, J. Rex)

- In the beginning of the 1970s it developed into an explicit political strategy in Canada

- It became instrumental in helping formulate policies for the so-called 'new immigration'

- Connected with the so-called 'identity politics' esp. in the USA

Multiculturalism

- The political relevance of multiculturalism in western democracies seems to be increasing:

- The problems posed by immigration, resurgence of nationalist movements, claims of disadvantaged socio-cultural groups, cultural fundamentalism... pose a growing challenge

- How much ethnic heterogeneity can a state tolerate? How best to accommodate such diversity?

Public & private domain
(John Rex)

- The ideal of M is a society which is unitary in the public domain but which encourages diversity in private or communal matters
- Public domain means institutions of law, politics and the economy
- Private domain concerns family, religion, morality
- No individual should have more or less rights, or a greater or lesser capacity to operate in the world because of their ethnic category
- Any kind of differential treatment in the public domain is a move away from the multicultural ideal

Public & private domain
(John Rex)

- Multicultural society therefore requires a shared political culture of public domain, in which the notion of equality of individuals prevails, but

- There should also be a space for a private domain of family, kinship, religion and some aspects of education, in which ethnic identities, values and bonds are appropriate and deserve protection (i.e. a number of separate cultures in the private sphere).

- Rex hopes that the public/private distinction can reduce conflict between minority 'ethnic' cultures and majority 'civic' cultures by assigning each to its own domain.

Problems...

- Much of the discussion about multiculturalism has been framed within discussion of the rights of minority cultures
- Problems: 'public culture' usually privileges the private culture of the dominant ethnic group (language, religion, etc.); the boundary between the public and the private is often not as clear
- Defenders of M generally operate in two ways:
- Respecting culture but treating it as a private matter (cf. John Rex)
- Granting collective rights specific to particular cultural groups may sometimes be justified, even necessary (cf. Will Kymlicka) → complex issues of how to balance group rights against individual rights