



Reflections on debates in the study of racism and ethnicity

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Going to cover

- Briefly: ‘social exclusion’ – a helpful debate?
- Key debates in the study of racisms & ethnicity.
 - Racialisation & ethnicisation – terminology & social change
 - Intersectionality and diversity
 - Identities
 - Shifting nature of racisms
- Effect of the user involvement debate.

Social exclusion

- From French 'exclusion sociale' - those excluded from social insurance
- Picked up in the EU Poverty Programmes & New Labour
- Gained popularity in the 1980s because it softens the language of poverty.
- Imprecise: Peace (2001) identifies 15 usages.
- Emphasis on *process* seems useful (Micklewright, 2002).
- The application of the concept to children needs more thought:
 - *Relativity*. Individuals excluded from a particular society in relation to other people in a given place (and at a given time).
 - *Agency*. People excluded by an act of some agent.
 - *Dynamics*. Exclusion may be because of dim future prospects and not just because of current circumstances.

'Race' and 'ethnicity'

- About processes of marking differences between people:
 - on the basis of assumptions about physical or cultural variations.
 - the meanings of these variations.
 - *boundary maintenance* (Anthias and Yuval-Davis, 1992).
- Processes of boundary maintenance are relational & involve social contestation, inclusion & exclusion.
- Socially constructed processes
 - Not natural or fixed, but categories and identities that result from particular ways of seeing people.

Frantz Fanon: 'Wretched of the Earth'; 'Black Skin White Masks'

- Colonisers and colonised are inextricably linked in the relational process of racialisation.

- the category 'white' depends for its stability on its negation, 'black'. Neither exists without the other.
- historically, both come into being with imperial conquest and the
- colonizer/colonized relationship is normalized in the psyche.

- These ideas - of process, relationality, psychological and social impact - have sedimented into the academic discourses of those who study 'race' and ethnicity:

- Ethnicity and 'race' are socially constructed,
- Involve power relations and
- Become socially significant through social, economic, cultural, and psychological processes.

Examples of geographical disjunction in racialisation

- I was accepted as a white person in Trinidad. For all practical purposes, I am coloured in England” (Gomes, 1973:53, cited in James, 1993:239”
- “When we came here we swore we were English because Guyana was British Guiana. [...] When you came here, you discovered it’s a different thing. If you’re English, you have to be white”. (Mrs. C, Oral Testimony, in Webster, 1998:44)

Remembered racialisation of whiteness

Q. When did you first become conscious of people's colours?

A. About the age of seven.

Q. What happened then?

A. I just gone off most Indian people, blacks, just don't like them.

Q. When you were seven what happened? Why-?

A. I just don't like what they are doing over here, staying in the country and getting in the way in the streets and they don't move... (White young man)

Racialisation involves social and psychological processes

- Reflection on changes in how they saw their racialised or ethnicised identities or assertion of not seeing.
- Changes were the result of responses to social understandings:
 - how they understood other people to see them.
 - How they saw other people.
- Meaning of 'race' and 'ethnicity' not fixed.

Flexible uses of socially constructed categories

- Shift in how 'black' is used.
- Increasing disaggregation of 'Asian' for policy analysis purposes (Modood, 198; Modood et al., 1997).
- Need to disaggregate 'black' for some purposes.
 - Students of African origin now doing almost as badly as African Caribbeans in school when African adults have been doing better at degree level.
 - Somali young people c.f. West African young people.
- Racialised definitions open to scrutiny & question
 - Outsider & insider mobilisations.

Key debates: Intersectionality

- Longstanding notion that everybody has multiple positions - e.g. on gender, 'race', social class, sexuality, embodiedness (Combahee River Collective; Anthias & Yuval-Davis; Brah).
- Attends to commonalities and differences between socially constructed categories of people.
- Allows analysis of how categories of difference intersect in social practices, institutions and cultural discourses.
- Recognises that power relations are important and complex.
- Attempt to capture the theoretical and methodological complexity of everyday life.

Key debates: Diversity

- Intragroup differences for all racialised and ethnicised groups
→ diversity
 - e.g. by national identities, gender, religion, embodiedness and social class
- Researchers on 'race' and ethnicity more diverse
 - c.f. 20 years ago 'Even the Rat was White' (Robert Guthrie, 1976).
 - Led to questioning of taken-for-granted assumptions & re-defining of research agenda.
 - Reinscription of informal segregation (Brown v. Board of Education c.f. British schools).
- Disciplinary diversity
 - moved beyond just sociology and anthropology in the study of 'race' and racism.
- Shifted focus away from outsider constructions of pathology (c.f. *The Empire Strikes Back*).
- 'Diversity' as plural possibilities – progressive aspiration & as concealing inequalities (Ahmed, 2004 'sticky' words).

Key debates: Century of controversy over research on 'race' & racism

■ Division between focus on:

- Relations between racialised & ethnicised groups in specific social contexts?
- Processes of discrimination and exclusion, and their impact on minority ethnic groups?

■ Government policy agendas affect research funding.

- Focus on racial and ethnic minorities as social problems, culturally deprived, deviant and marginal.
- No funding for studying minority ethnic group

Impact of user involvement on the study of racism & ethnicity 1

- Debates on user involvement have influenced research agenda & conclusions.
 - Still not much involvement of minority ethnic groups in participatory research.
 - Who to involve and how? Representatives? Emancipatory research?
 - Black people frequently involved as technical solutions to problems of getting 'good data' or to defend against criticism – contingent and cynical inclusion.

Impact of user involvement on the study of racism & ethnicity 2

- Process of challenge to research expertise on minority ethnic groups mostly came from contestation, not 'inclusion' (c.f. Disability Rights)
 - Came to the fore in the civil rights & Black Power movements (*Empire Strikes Back*, 1982, CCCS)
 - Resistance to the proposed 'race' question on 1981 Census.
 - Includes insider accounts & focus on whiteness.

User/Insider involvement since the 1960s

‘The subjects had changed from passive objects to active critics of the research process. Increasingly, the social scientist began to look in the 1960s like another agent of the power structure, like the policeman, teacher, welfare worker: an outsider who entered ghettos and barrios to advance personal and institutional goals that were determined outside the community of study. This led to calls for a new dialogue between social scientists and the racially oppressed. Accordingly many researchers set themselves the goal of sympathetically understanding why blacks, as a collectivity, are located where they are today in relationship to whites – in terms of power, wealth, status and development.’ (Bulmer and Solomos, 2004, *Researching ‘race’ and racism.*)

Conclusions

- Study of 'race' & racism still much debated & contested.
- Contradictory possibilities from research.
 - **Identities** –deficit models & recognising multiple identities; contradictions between syncretism and the fixing of identities.
 - **'User involvement'** both progressive & tokenistic.
- **Racisms change** over time and place – complex intersections with social categories to which people belong.