Racist Theories and the North –South Divide

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Introduction

The North-South divide has a long history that is rooted in colonialism, exploitation and unequal power dynamics affecting negotiations, decision-making processes and the distribution of benefits and burdens in global governance. The industrialized nations of the North, having advanced economics have always possessed greater political sway and set the global agenda, unlike the southern nations which are underdeveloped, impoverished and frequently finding itself at the bottom of the chain, and at disadvantage in discussions and decision-making on the global scene. Furthermore, the North have traditionally controlled trade agreements, setting terms and conditions that are beneficial to their economies and industries, while the South on the other hand, have always had challenges in sustaining its local economies, agricultural sectors and equal access to markets, hence, the opportunities for economic growth and development in the south are limited by their unequal bargaining strength and asymmetric trade relations.

The North-South divide is a term used to describe the social, economic, political and cultural disparities between the Northern Hemisphere and the Southern Hemisphere. Geographically, there is a divide between the north and the south. The Northern Hemisphere comprises Europe, North-America, Japan and New Zealand, on the other side of the South, there is Africa, Asia, and South-America. The North-South divide first emerged during the colonial era when European countries imposed rule over large territories, exploited resources, and shaped political systems to their benefit. The developed countries formed the North and named first world countries, while the underdeveloped –developing countries formed the South and named third world countries. It was observed that one part

of the world was gradually developing more that the others, leaving the other part underdeveloped and lagging behind; this disparity in growth is as a result of identified gaps in the areas of developments viz: the literacy level (science and technology), availability of food (food security), level of security and insecurity, barkata income, large expenses, infant mortality, life expectancy, productivity, unemployment etc.

Whereas, European nations were using the wealth and resources of African countries to build hospitals, improve on schools and grow their economy, the places where the resources were taken from were not having the same quality of services, to the extent that those within the southern hemisphere became the producers of raw material and consumers of finished commodities, making Africa more of a dumping site or a test-run centre for Europe's experiments without industries or proper development in their countries. The widened gap gave the definition of developed North and underdeveloped South –the Rich North, the Poor South. All the members of the G8 come from the north, as well as four permanent members of the Un Security Council. The highly industrialized countries that constitutes the northern hemisphere profit from cutting-edge technology, infrastructure and access to international markets, thereby limiting the representation and engagement of the southern hemisphere in the international economic system, stemming from issues including poverty, poor infrastructure and a reliance on exporting raw resources.

Race

Race is a historical concept used to categorize people based on biological differences such as skin colour and body type, and operate intersectional with gender and class. It is the idea that the human species is divided into distinct groups based on inherited physical and behavioural traits.

According to Davis and More, no society is ever unstratified or totally classless as social stratification is both universal and necessary, and regarded as a functional necessity. A stratification system isa structure that refers to a system of positions and not the individuals in the system, focusing on how certain positions come to occupy certain positions as there would continue to be people with low or high educational attainment, poor or excellent housing conditions, low or high income,

and varying levels of access to the means of sustenance and control over the means of production. Roediger 1991, argues that racism developed largely as a popular phenomenon resulting from the psychic tensions of recently proletarianized whites who with both envy and contempt, falsely perceived Blacks to be living lives free of the new industrial discipline.

Park 1950, considers race a natural consequence of the geographical isolation of human subgroups, which over time leads to sharp cultural and crucially physical distinctions; he further submits that racial prejudice and oppression is also a natural outcome of relations between given racial groups as a result of deep-seated impulses.

Cox 1959, views race as simply any group of people that is generally believed to be, and generally accepted as a race in any given area of ethnic competition.

The emergence of racism especially against Africans could be traced to the 16th Century, where white men in South–Africa were establishing military and social superiority over non-whites. The impact of the slave trade on relations between the Europeans and Africans informed the ideology of racism and prejudice, as it was an integral part of the capitalist mode of production. There is no gainsaying that no people can enslave another for centuries without coming out with a notion of superiority, leveraging on the colour disparity and physical traits of the people in question. All the racial and colour prejudice in Europe are perceived to have derived from the enslavement of Africans and the exploitation of non-white people in the early centuries of international trade, as it would have been impossible to open up the New World and use it as a constant generator of wealth, but for the constant labour of Africans, since there were no other alternatives for the Europeans.

The utter dependence on African labour aided Europeans at home and abroad to rationalize that exploitation in racists' terms as well as oppression follows logically from exploitation, thereby marrying oppression of Africans on purely racial ground with oppression for economic reasons.
Europeans have used erroneous ideas on racism to justify their domination of non-Europeans in the colonial era. When the French Revolution was made in the name

of Liberty, Equality and Fraternity, the black Africans who were enslaved by France in the West Indies and Indian Ocean were not included but rather, fought against when they tried to emancipate themselves. Likewise, millions of Jews were put into gas chambers under the Nazis in a "democratic" Europe. The 18th Century saw the peak of racial prejudice in the United States with the first martyr in the American national war of liberation against British colonialists who was of African descent –Crispus Attucks, where both enslave and free Africans played a vital role in Washington's armies. Yet, the American constitution sanctioned the continued enslavement of Africans and American Indians despite its famous preamble that all men are created equal; there is no gainsaying that this preamble is only effective in theory but completely opposite in practice. The issue of race can be examined through three major sociological perspectives viz: functionalism, conflict theory and symbolic interactionism.

The Functionalism Theory of Race

In the functionalism view, racism can contribute positively to society; all the elements of society have functions that promote solidarity and maintain order and stability in the society. Thus, people can be observed from various racial and ethnic backgrounds harmoniously interacting in a state of social balance. However, when one or more racial or ethnic groups face discriminations and inequalities in the spheres of life, crisis is inevitable which births tension and conflicts stemming from temporary dysfunction of the social system. The protests of numerous states in the US at the year 2020, demanding racial justice and restructuring of the police was triggered by the killing of a Black man –George Floyd by a White police officer.

Racism can positively contribute to the functioning of society by strengthening bonds between members of same class in the society, as the consciousness of their social standings (upper and lower)) would aid or restrict their activities and function in their various spaces. Furthermore, the subjugated groups are deprived so much of showcasing what they have to offer. Racism is functional for the dominant group as it gives it an edge over the discriminated/prejudiced group, giving room for exploitation and oppression.

Racism morally justifies a racially unequal society, hence, the ultimate causes of racism is embedded in the inherent instability of capitalist class relations as it is

casually dependent on class oppression in some way or another. Racism makes it more difficult for workers to organize as a class against exploitation from capitalists; hence, capitalists keep more of the social surplus as profit. Race is a belief-dependent construct as one's race could depend majorly on other people's conception/perception of it. This conception further gives rise to the establishment of structures that promote racism in the areas of schools, hospitals, governance as well as international relations between the North and South. This is why during the trans-Atlantic trade era, especially in Europe and America, Blacks were segregated and prohibited in those areas; schools for Blacks were different and less equipped, same with hospitals. In the area of governance, Blacks were even prohibited from exercising their franchise during electoral processes.

In the early history of Europe's colonial acquisitions in the Western Hemisphere, unfree-labour-either slavery of undentured servitude was quite normal, and unfree labourers could be of European, African, indigenous American, or any other descent (Cox, 2001). There was intense competition for exploitation of the New World by colonial powers which led to a huge shortage of labour in Europe; this situation was enveloped by African slave labour in the British colonies with a blend of African and indigenous slave labour in the Spanish and Portuguese colonies. The rise of capitalism and nationalism aided in the development of racial exploitation and race prejudice among Europeans; the policies and attitudes of the leading capitalist people are responsible for all racial antagonisms. Functionalists argue that division may be an effect, whether or not it was actually intended by capitalists.

The Conflict Theory of Race

Conflict theory asserts that the society comprises diverse social classes or groups that are constantly competing for the control of power and resources; it views society as a system characterized by competition, inequality and conflict between various interest groups in the society. However, the dominant groups, predominantly the ruling class, sustain their power and privileges acquired through intimidation and exploitation by controlling resources, institutions and laws that are beneficial to their interests, thereby birthing social inequality where some facets of the society are more advantageous than others.

Karl Marx, the famous propounder of this theory, argued that the history of human societies is marked by class tussle, and believed that the dominant economic system –capitalism was undoubtedly unjust and exploitative, giving the ruling class free hand to amass wealth and power to the detriment of the working class. He views that the most effective means to achieve social change and create a more equitable society is through revolution.

This theory holds that dominant groups in the society use law and the mechanism of its enforcement to minimize threats to their interest posed by whom they perceive dangerous, which most often than not are minorities and poor people of certain groups. The rising power of Black Africans after the Civil War in the late nineteenth century introduced the Jim Crow's draconian laws that harshly limited Black political and social power. An example is the Black surgical technician – Vivien Thomas, who was classified as a janitor and paid as such for many years, despite helping to develop the groundbreaking surgical technique that saves the lives of "blue babies", as well as conducting complicated surgical experiments.

The unrecognized efforts and contributions of black women for NASA during the Space Race in the 1960s were highlighted in the popular film *Hidden Figures* (2016). The film shed more light on many institutional discriminations faced by women of colour as a result of the Jim's draconian laws, like being overlooked for superior positions and roles, lesser welfare, admission denial into certain universities of study as well as choice of study, office segregation etc.

Symbolic Interactionism Theory of Race

Famed interactionist Herbert Blumer asserts that interactions between members of the dominant group informed racial prejudice, that racist views would not be held if these interactions did not ensue between individuals of the dominant group. The dominant group supports views in adverse to the subordinate group as a result of the abstract picture created about the subordinate group to maintain the status quo.

The interactionist perspective looks at how people define their race and the race of others; President Obama is considered the "first Black President" or the "first African American President" even though his mother was white and his father,

Kenyan, and neither did Latinos become white because the census removed the Hispanic category as a race. Some sociologists like Kathleen Blee has opined that racism is learned; she came to this conclusion after conducting life history interviews with women in white supremacist groups and discovered that most of the women learned to be racist being in the group as they were hitherto not racists.

Conclusion

Racist theories admonish all white people for being oppressors while classifying all Black people as hopelessly oppressed victims. It is an international knowledge that the people of the Northern hemisphere are considered first class citizens of the world, while the people of the Sothern hemisphere are considered third class citizens and tagged third world countries.

In relating the theories of race discussed above, it would be observed that they all dealt relations between sects of human existence – The dominant and subordinate. The dominant groups are characterized with good standard of living, durable roads, well equipped and accessible health care facilities, quality education and controlled population; even the law and legislature work in their favour. The subordinate groups on the other side of the divide are deprived all of the above mentioned, thereby limiting their participation and potential exploration in decision-making process on the international scene. The dominant groups are always known for oppression and exploitation and further justify racism by creating adverse abstract picture of the subordinate group with the aim of soliciting support for their racial and prejudicial views of the subordinate group.

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