

## *Original Paper*

# Plasticity of Contemporary Racism: World-system Approach Anomalies and Emergence of Miles-Phizacklea 1977 Paradigm

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### ***Abstract***

*Contemporary racism has been explained by a large number of perspectives, since the end of World War II, its nature was associated with Colonialism, a type of analysis based on the approach of race relations and complemented by the approach of the world-system. The present study develops a critical analysis with the world-system approach and lists the analytical improvements provided by the so-called Miles-Phizacklea 1977 paradigm. The conclusions of our research suggest that the methodological positivism of the world-system approach is successful only from a macrosociological perspective. However, the Miles-Phizacklea 1977 paradigm is capable of offering broader explanations related to contemporary racism. This paper offers guidelines that can help future research on the combination of micro and macro-sociological racism analysis.*

### ***Keywords***

*racism, world-system, Robert Miles, Annie Phizacklea, plasticity*

### **1. Introduction**

Within the Social Sciences and especially Historiography and Sociology, the Wallerstenian world-system approach has been predominant since the 1970s. Previously, between the 1940s and 1960s, the functionalist approach was prevailing—Wallerstein assumed some elements from sociological functionalism. The world-system approach did not address racism centrally among its theoretical presuppositions. Among some exceptions, the world-system analysis focused directly on politics and assumed the colonial history of racialized human groups.

Robert Ezra Park, the co-founder of the race relations approach with Booker T. Washington (see Park & Washington, 1912), laid the basis for the colonial vision of racism by assuming that class, status, and

caste differences are generated through ethnic principles and the division of labor in societies. These views were expanded by Park in his later works (see Park & Burgess, 1921; Park, 1922). Among some of the authors who continued some of Park's principles, with greater or fewer nuances, the Marxist Oliver Cromwell Cox was one of the most relevant. However, the race relations approach was mainly assumed by the founders of the colonial paradigm Aimé Césaire, Albert Memmi, Franz Fanon, and Edward Said, the British sociologist Michael Banton, and the world-system approach.

Among the many characteristics of the world-system approach, two are purely characteristic. One of them is the assumption of the existence of economic dependence between the so-called north and south; these concepts become both conceptual and geopolitical. The north-south difference was forged during the 20th century from the first appreciations about the difference between centers and peripheries. In the 1950s, through the Prebisch-Singer Hypothesis (see Singer, 1949; Prebisch, 1950), and in the 1960s, with German sociologist Andre Gunder Frank's Dependency Theory (see 1966), the idea of "centers" and "peripheries" became predominant. The center-periphery dynamic (with semi-peripheries), both political and geographical but primarily economic, characterized the world-system approach as a central feature. The approach was supported by the idea that some regions of the planet perpetually dominate others. Moreover, concerning that domination, the center's individuals' racism is perpetuated against the periphery, irrevocably racialized.

The consideration of centers and peripheries was a theoretical characteristic of union between the approach of race relations, the postcolonial paradigm, and the world-system analysis. Given this conjunction, from the end of the 1980s and early 1990s, it was considered that social relations obey functionalist premises, where the social system and human groups are determined by their political position in the center or the periphery (Wallerstein, 1989; Boyne, 1990; Featherstone, 1995).

## **2. Theoretical Background and Literature Review**

There is a preponderant political-economic aspect of the world-system approach within the Social Sciences. However, as it is a type of social analysis, its principles emanate anthropological assumptions. Racism, in this sense, is explained within the world-system as a colonial consequence. Colonialism is viewed as a consequence of an imperial character and the tendency to expand. This imperial character leads us to the central object of discussion, expansion as a Western and eurocentric domination principle. Is racism a consequence of political centers and peripheries? Can racism be explained mainly as a consequence of Colonialism? Is racism a consequence of the tendency to political expansion? Many intellectuals may be compelled to consider that racism is an anthropological form of human expansion, which is a consequence of economic and political imperialism. Despite the promising results as an analytical technique of the world-system within sociology, certain theoretical elements regarding its anthropological consequences can be discussed (Fenelon, 2016; Fletcher, 2016; Winant, 2017).

After particular works in the late 1800s by the activist and co-founder of the Alabama Tuskegee Institute, Booker T. Washington (1896, 1901, 1909), the strong influence of the socialist sociologist W. E. B. Du Bois (1898, 1899, 1903), and Robert Park's early productions, various studies suggested that race relations were based on the "imperial imagination" originated by Colonialism. At present, various studies continue to consider that the processes and feelings of racialization are based on the colonial mentality, on nationalist fantasies and the collective unconscious (Frosh, 2013; Burman, 2016; Hirvonen, 2017). The colonial vision, called the postcolonial paradigm, emerged in the 1950s. From an anthropological perspective, it was subsumed by the world-system approach in the 1980s. It was argued that political centers and peripheries determined trade, economic dependency, and social development. Likewise, the idea was sustained as a natural tendency towards the European expansion of Westernism, conceiving such expansion and the general practice of domination as a "superior form of capitalism", as Vladimir Illich Lenin expressed.

In a different sense, different ideas emerged from the neo-colonial and center-periphery dynamic premises. In 1973, scholars Stephen Castles and Godula Kosack published *Immigrant workers and class str. in Western Europe*. In their work, Castles and Kosack warned that the first international oil crisis and the paralysis of contracts for temporary immigrant workers in Western Europe would lead to racial outbreaks. In the 1970s, Western industrial capacity slowed down, and ongoing recession and cyclical economic crises began. The authors gave a fundamental role to the economy and not to pure colonialism as a cause of racial segregation. Along the same lines, the British sociologist Robert Miles, together with the scholar Annie Phizacklea, began to develop a publication on economic explanations of racial reality. Their explanations were relatively based on the views of Castles and Kosack. Miles and Phizacklea's early productions included *Class, Race, Ethnicity and Political Action* and *Black Workers, and New Commonwealth Immigration, 1954-1973* of 1977, as well as other popular productions (see 1978, 1979, 1980, 1984). At present, concerning racial analysis, cognitive and materialistic tendencies can be distinguished, where the former is based on the postcolonial model and the latter on the economic explanatory models. While producing materialistic and economic explanations from a political perspective, the world-system analysis maintains a colonial explanation about domination between human groups.

### 3. Methodology

The analysis methodology used by the present work rejects the purely macro-sociological analysis as well as a purely micro-sociological one. Macrosociological analysis is used by both the postcolonial paradigm and the world-system approach. For its part, micro-sociological analysis has a psychological character and is related to race relations and cognitive interpretative frameworks. The constructionist methodology—do not confuse it with "social constructivism"—interprets reality as a dialectical consequence between micro-sociology (agents) and macro-sociology (system). A type of constructionist methodology considers the knowledge as legitimized through social interaction

objectified by individual interaction. In this way, it is assumed that knowledge normalizes the perception, interpretation, and orientation of the surrounding reality to reproduce it culturally through objectified social constructs.

#### 4. Discussion

The founding principles of the world-system approach are based on the existence of historical expansionist tendencies (see Wallerstein, 1974, 1975, 1979). These principles held ideas about Colonialism as an imperial form of western expansion. Previously, authors such as the Marxist sociologist Oliver Cromwell Cox advocated the existence of a world-system designed by a world-economy. Cox and other authors also approached social systems principles from an anthropological perspective (see Cox, 1959, 1962, 1964). Immanuel Wallerstein, the modern founder of the world-system approach (whose antecedents go back to the 1920s with the *École des Annales* and the 1870s with the *École méthodique*), did not directly address issues of racism until his 1988 work—published in 1991 in English—*Race, nation, class: ambiguous identities*. In this sense, although his approach is successful from a political and economic perspective, it is not completely successful from a social, cultural, and an ethnographic perspective.

##### 4.1 Objectivation

Peter Berger and Thomas Luckmann, the founders of modern social constructionism in 1966, thought that social constructions explain “the processes by which anybody of ‘knowledge’ comes to be socially accepted as reality. Reality does not exist as a world out there. Rather, people continuously create, through their actions and interactions, a shared reality that is experienced as objectively factual and subjectively meaningful. In this light, family as a concept or practice is the construct or artifact of a group of people. It is a human product rather than manifestation of any inherent and transhistorical essences”. (Wong, 2013). Following previous lines, ideas such as “race”, “caste”, or “ethnic group” are linked to the human capacity to differentiate between the “me” and “not-me” (the called “otherness”). This characteristic of human anthropology is capable of explaining personal self-recognition and social exclusion. Thereby, racism and other social aversions use a cultural and state-owned character as a resource. A colonial, expansive, and chronological vision of social reality presupposes that political oppression is inherited and generally the result of subjectivation (Steinmetz, 2013; Stuart, 2016; Getachew, 2020). However, a constructionist perspective does not consider that subjectivation occurs in the Hegelian style. Hegel understood the subjectivation as a reconciliation of the objective spirit—*Naturalphilosophie* as the successor of the *Transcendentalphilosophie*. From a constructionist perspective, subjectivation is a form of objectification by reproducing the previously externalized (Pocock, 2012; Byrne, 2016; Wade & Harper, 2020). In this way, a constructionist perspective can explain how racial presuppositions change between cultural entities and explain why the difference between “me” and “not-me” only as a constant dynamic.

#### 4.2 Centers and Peripheries

Another of the world-system approach's most relevant ideas is the difference between centers and peripheries as an extension of the neocolonial paradigm and race relations. This difference is commonly used to explain inherited inequalities between geopolitically distant human groups. Following the premises that differentiate the world centers and peripheries, racialization is carried out from the colonizing center on the historically colonized "arenas" (Gordon, 2006; Grosfoguel, 2011, 2016). However, this view has presented theoretical anomalies. Historically, different human groups have rejected, segregated, excluded, and stigmatized other groups not only from the periphery but within the centers and within the peripheries itself. If we look at four of the last significant genocides that have occurred in the world, we will appreciate that there were primarily and directly colonial reasons on no occasion. No colonial principles can be adduced on the Serbian genocide against Bosniaks (1992-1995) within the Federal Yugoslav Republic (1992-2003), nor on the Hutu genocide against Tutsis (1995) in Rwanda, nor the Darfur conflict (2003 - present) in South Sudan, nor lastly in the Rohingya genocide (2016 - present) in Myanmar. The different cultural dimensions within nation-states have shown that any expression of racism should be capable of explaining its "multidimensionality" and its "historical specificity". Given that its articulation differs based on "class interests, strategies of resistance and the different material and cultural contexts" that occasionally "obscure its multidimensionality and specificity" (Miles & Brown, 2003, pp. 171-172; see also Law, 2010; Lee, 2016; Stone, 2018). One of the main problems related to the idea of center-periphery dynamics refers to the notion that ideally, everything can be considered "the center". Indeed, when a human group racializes another, the region is not relevant to explain the situation. In other words, an aggressor social group always offers the ideal impression of being the "center", even when neither geographically nor politically it is. Likewise, different groups within nation-states, such as anti-system movements or urban tribes (like skinheads, punks, etc.), have generated racist ideals not directly related to conflicts between nations or historical processes Colonialism.

#### 4.3 Tendency to Expansionism

Historically the trend towards Western expansionism has been related to Eurocentrism. In the same way, European expansionism has been linked to Colonialism. Much of modern historiography considers that the ideological role of Eurocentrism represents a crucial expression of the expansion. In turn, the political tendency to expand has been linked to anthropological inclinations to expand the living space (the so-called *Lebensraum*). The existence of an expansive anthropological direction implies that the "center" is always the standard of differentiation form against "the other". However, as was mentioned concerning the center's problems and the periphery, the self-other dialectic has been developed both within the colonial zones and the colonized and non-colonial areas. A human tendency towards expansion implies that racial difference represents something ontologically different. Commonly, the trend towards anthropological growth responds both to the sense of moral superiority and to the "course" of history—something called "manifest destiny" (Miller, 2006; Madsen, 2010; Pfaff, 2010;

Jung, Vargas, & Bonilla-Silva, 2011). In this sense, the superiority resulting from the “course” of history can be understood as a consequence of Colonialism, while labor needs respond to the nation-state’s cultural situation.

## 5. Conclusions

The present research considers expanded racial prototypes, such as Islamophobia, Gynophobia, or anti-Semitism. However, it also finds that many racist prejudices tend to be reproduced within nation-states and through cultural patterns. This idea refutes the assumption that racism emanates from a “historical course”. Of course, historical and macro cultural trends hold substantial sociological implications. However, large-scale historical circumstances can only be articulated through everyday manifestations and micro-sociological manifestations. In this sense, an institution like the nation-state—and all related institutions—is essential for racial reproduction.

As a continuation of the framework for analyzing race relations and the postcolonial paradigm, the world-system approach supports a linear and cumulative historiographic vision. In this way, the model conceives stereotypes through a sequential, linear, and macro-sociological heritage. This idea globally differentiates between the “me” and the “not-me” (“alien”) through classical functionalism (Parsons, 1966; Smelser, 1973; Alexander & Colomy, 1985). This kind of social metafunction has been rejected today (Smith, 2010; Thompson, 2013; Ormerod, 2019). The perspective of the world-system is not-focused with respect to racism. Thus, the role of nation-states, nationalism, territorial emotionality and other everyday cultural phenomena were generally not considered. From a perspective such as the Miles-Phizacklea paradigm of 1977 (given the name of its authors Robert Miles and Annie Phizacklea and the year in which its production began), the macro-sociological (historical) and the micro-sociological (psychologist) aspects related to racism are balanced.

Among Miles and Phizacklea’s paradigm improvements is their ability to understand Colonialism as an *ad hoc* product of Capitalism. The analysis of the world-system, for its part, considers Colonialism as a natural “derivation” of Capitalism. The Miles-Phizacklea 1977 paradigm does not directly analyze the role of colonial “arenas” as the world-system model does. The paradigm considers that racial representations are reproduced both historically and from the perspective of everyday social life. In this way, the paradigm compensates for its explanations between macro and micro-sociology by centrally contemplating the action of nation-states, intellectual and philosophical movement movements such as the Enlightenment, Romanticism or postmodernity, as well as cultural ideas about rationality, the hegemonic, political freedom or science (Miles & Brown, 2003, p. 121; Phizacklea & Westwood, 2013; Phizacklea, 2016). The world-system approach has been accused of *provincializing* politics, economics, and anthropology by analyzing social exclusion through geography, markets, and civil segments. Such ideas have occasionally been categorized as the *Westphalian narrative*, typical of the Eurocentric sociological perspectives. Such approaches analyze historical contradictions through central and peripheral colonial “arenas”, dependency, and Westernism. It is a historiographically successful

approach but presents difficulties in capturing all the anthropological phenomena related to racism. From an anthropological perspective, the world-system analysis, by developing these contradictions on a macro-sociological scale, falls into the so-called abstract (or “methodological”) universalism (Mitchell, 2004; Burawoy, 2005; Hobson, 2009). This methodological universalism mainly supports two anomalies: the first is the lack of consideration of the collective unconscious concerning social transformation. The underlying cultural ideas of a human community contain, among others, stigmas, taboos, and moral values that increase or reduce nihilism, alienation, or social rage. Social groups have historically been characterized by their ability to mythologize or reject tradition. The self-oppressive, motivating, or revolutionary capacity of a social group is not captured by positivist methodologies that commonly remain leveraged in institutionalism. The second anomaly, strongly related to the first, refers to the lack of consideration of ideologies. Since the 18th century, racism has been considered, not without reason, as a type of “ideological” social exclusion form. This kind of discrimination, in fact, encompasses all other types of racism, such as institutional, cultural, or “elite”.

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