



ORIGINAL PAPER

Cultural Racism: A Conceptual Framework

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Abstract

The term 'racism' is omnipresent in the current everyday discourse. The concept was conceptualized in different sciences but continues to raise debates and controversies. This paper is a contribution to the conceptual delineation regarding the racism and other phenomena associated with it, such as ethnocentrism and xenophobia, focusing especially on the term of 'cultural racism'. After outlining a framework for defining this term and depicting the main features of racist thinking processes, such as essentialization, reductionism and absolutization, the paper gives particular attention to the discussions regarding the question if cultural racism is a new form of the 'classical', biological racism, or represents a different phenomenon, and this would be the reason why, in the scientific discourse, there should be used another, more adequate term, which should replace the problematic word 'racism'. The main arguments of the theoretical perspectives which sustain each answer are presented, thus highlighting the key aspects of the contemporary racism. Furthermore some remarks are made regarding the approach and research of this phenomenon and it is emphasized that emergent questions require further investigation both for the theoretical development and the practical application and anti-racist strategies.

Keywords: *racism, cultural racism, racism without races, ethnocentrism, xenophobia, essentialization*

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Introduction

Presently, the term “racism” appears frequently both in the media and political, as well as in the everyday discourse. The debates opened by this concept cannot be ignored by the scientific approaches, even more as the term generated many controversies, and the developed – more or less scientific – theoretical perspectives were used to support or justify practical action and controversial political interventions. Compared with the investigation of other ideologies, the approach of racism is more complex, precisely because the terms on which it is based and on which it relies, in particular those of “race” and “races classification/ hierarchy” are debatable and objectionable. Based on such terms and often allegedly “in the name of science” were justified not only different forms of discrimination, but also – in addition – extreme forms of segregation, expulsions and extermination of certain groups of people. Under these circumstances, scientific discourse should delineate itself from other discourses and should investigate this phenomenon using scientific methods and procedures.

The present paper addresses the conceptual and theoretical problems of contemporary racism and especially the concept of “cultural racism”. This topic is still of great interest within sociology and other social sciences. There are delineated the ways in which the issue of racism has been sociologically conceptualized and the main significant theses and theoretical approaches concerning the phenomenon of cultural or “differential” racism. The central aspect which I follow is the question if there exists a shift from an era of the classical biological racism to that of the emergence of new cultural forms of racism.

In the first part of the paper there are discussed the key definitions of racism, and are addressed other concepts, such as ethnocentrism and xenophobia, from which the term “racism” distinguishes itself. The following section gives an outline of the significant issues relating to contemporary racism, focusing especially on the conceptualization of the cultural (neo) racism and on the main features of racialist thinking processes, such as essentialization, reductionism and absolutization. In the third part there is discussed the question if the current forms of cultural racism represent a new phenomenon or they are a manifestation of the proto-racism. In the last part of the paper the key aspects of the contemporary racism are highlighted and some remarks about its research are made.

1. Conceptual framework

Firstly, the conceptual framework of the issue of racism is outlined by discussing some common definitions of “racism” and its delineation from other concepts such as “ethnocentrism” and “xenophobia”.

1.1 Definitions of racism – from narrow to extensive definitions

The term “racism” is one of the most controversial and ambiguous concepts in the social sciences (see Mac Ghail, 1999; Sow, 2008; Koller, 2009; Fredrickson, 2011). Being frequently imprecise and unreflected, and even banalized as a result of its political usage and overloading in mass-media (Taguieff, 2005c), this term also generates many problems with regard to a scientific definition. According to Taguieff (2005c: 549), since it is not possible to reach a whole, universally applicable definition, an appropriate approach would be that any science that makes use of this term to delineate its conceptual content.

In a narrow definition, for example, R. Miles (1982; 1991) suggests that the various meanings and uses of “racism” should be scientifically limited for analytical

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reasons by referring exclusively to it as to an ideological phenomenon. Miles bases his viewpoint on the fact that “the analytical value of a concept is determined by its utility for the description and explanation of social processes” (Miles, 1991: 103). Racism refers to practices and processes of exclusion, though this is, according to Miles, an overstretch, which “on one hand does not have sufficient separation sharpness, on the other hand makes the determination of deterministic relationships more difficult” (ibid.).

In order to achieve an analytical accuracy, racism should be therefore understood as a representational phenomenon, and so should be determined not by its function, but by its ideological content. According to Miles, this ideological content consists, on the one hand, of a process of racial construction, which means that one or more biological features are used as a criterion for the description of a collective group, these characteristics being regarded as natural and unchanging and attributed as the intrinsic differentiation opposite to other groups (ibid.: 105). On the other hand, all the people who belong to this collective group are attributed additional, negative – both biological and cultural – characteristics and consequently “the presence of such a group appears to be highly problematic: it is presented ideologically as a threat” (ibid.: 106).

C. Lévi-Strauss (1983; 1988) has also a narrow view on racism by defining it in the sense of “classical” meaning. He considers racism as a precise doctrine that can be summed up in four points (Lévi-Strauss, 1988: 208): firstly, a correlation between genetic heritage and intellectual skills and moral attitudes is constructed; secondly, it is claimed that this heritage, on which these skills and attitudes are dependent, is common to all members of certain groups of people; thirdly, these groups, referred to as “races”, may be hierarchized according to the “quality of their genetic heritage”; fourthly, these differences entitle the so-called “superior races” to dominate, exploit, and even annihilate the other races. Compared to Miles’ point of view, this definition takes into account not only a theoretical but also a practical component of racism, since it involves actions and behaviors. Nevertheless, according to this definition (cf. Taguieff, 2005c: 558), no racism could exist in the present, at least not as a significant phenomenon concerning the social and political sphere.

In the same direction, but with a greater covered area, G.M. Fredrickson (2011) asserts that racism has two components: difference and power. In the first place, racism corresponds to a delimitation of the alleged own human group from all “Others”. In this respect, “They” differ from “Us” permanently, and these differences are not bridging (Fredrickson, 2011: 19). As the differentiation is always in favor of “Us”, this feeling of difference provides a motive, respectively a justification, to treat the “inferior Others” unjustly or cruelly.

The spectrum of possible consequences of this interplay of attitude and action ranges from an unofficial, but continuous practiced social discrimination, to genocide; between them lies something like the racial separation, which is sanctioned by the government, colonial subjugation, exclusion, expulsion (or “ethnic cleansing”), and enslavement (Fredrickson, 2011: 19-20).

In this understanding of racism one can see a much broader range of meanings. Fredrickson no longer talks about the role of biological / genetic features as differentiation criteria. Thus is this definition more imprecise, but it gives the concept of racism a broader range of coverage by considering also cultural characteristics as starting points. In addition, this author emphasizes the element of power: racism appears where a group of people has power over other groups. It is, therefore, a matter of domination and

subordination, of “racists” and their victims (ibid.: 20). Last but not least, one can note that, in this perspective, the “function” of racism (in the sense of Miles’ understanding) is emphasized, namely, what actions are carried out in the name of racist attitudes.

The coverage area of the concept of racism is even more extensive in other comprehensions. The term is sometimes also used without having specified an analytical framework, especially in the everyday, media and political discourse. Thus “racism seems to have become today a *passé-partout* under which seemingly any discrimination of the «others» can be subsumed” (Priester, 1997: 13). The broad use of the concept of racism makes it an approximate synonym for exclusion, rejection, discrimination, hostility, hate, intolerance, phobia or contempt (Taguieff, 2005c: 555). In the French language are used (ibid.) e.g. terms like “racism against the youth”, “racism against the elderly”, “racism against women”, “racism against homosexuals” or “racism against the French”, etc.. From this point of view, it becomes more difficult or even impossible not only to develop relevant scientific approaches, but also to develop accurate, anti-racist strategies at the actual, practical level.

1.2 Delimitation of racism from ethnocentrism and xenophobia

Before approaching cultural racism, I am discussing two other concepts which have comparable meanings to that of racism: ethnocentrism and xenophobia. These terms are often used in a confusing way as synonyms for racism. Whereas all these concepts refer to the problematic relationship between “Us” and the “Others”, still they do not overlap.

The concept of “ethnocentrism” was introduced in 1906 by W.G. Sumner in his book *Folkways*. According to Sumner, one can denote ethnocentrism as the perception according to which the group of people, to which «We» belong, is the center of the world, and the measure to which we refer in order to judge others (Sumner, 1906: 13). As a result, each group of people got their own pride and own vanity, claims their superiority, regards contemptuously the outsiders, and believes that only their *folkways* are good, whereas those of others, if they are at all noticed, are despised (ibid.).

Ethnocentrism implies therefore, on one hand, a fundamental distinction between each particular group and other groups, or between “Us” and all members of the category “Others” (“They” or “Non-We”). On the other hand ethnocentrism presupposes furthermore a focus on one’s own group and an overestimation of the qualities that are exclusively assigned to it. This leads to self-preference and contempt and intolerance towards others. According to this definition, ethnocentrism indicates a global, universal phenomenon (equally cognitive, affective, evaluative, and normative) (cf. ibid.).

Other, later definitions of ethnocentrism (see Lévi-Strauss, 1961; Taguieff, 1997; Ferréol, 2005; Fredrickson, 2011) retain the fundamental elements already described by Sumner. Ethnocentrism is based on a strong identification of the individual with his group and on a certainty of one’s own superiority of a certain number of values, opinions or ideas. It can be considered as an attitude, as a mental disposition or as a behavior, which is accompanied by the rejection of cultural diversity (Ferréol, 2005: 285). Etymologically, the term “xenophobia” means fear and, in a broader sense, hostility to all that is alien, and especially to foreigners themselves (Jucquois, 2005: 672). If the meaning of the Greek word “phobia”, from which the concept originates, is taken into account, xenophobia would fit into a large category of phobias. However, in the humanities and social sciences it is regarded above all as a collective attitude and not as an individual neurosis (ibid.). However, there are many disputes regarding its definition. According to Taguieff (2005c:

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553), xenophobia refers to fear, hatred, and resentment towards foreigners, and generally to everything that is foreign or different, or what belongs to the “Non-I”. Taguieff points out (ibid.) that the term “heterophobia” instead of “xenophobia” would be preferable because it does not imply a privileged relationship with nationalism.

According to Jucquois (2005: 675), xenophobia contains negative and “pessimistic” views either against certain ethnic groups or against all other ethnic groups. This author speaks about three characteristics of xenophobia: firstly, the fear generated by the perception of a danger from a supposed “contamination” and the threat that this contamination would be for the own ethnic group; secondly, in response to this fear, the will to resist this threat, in the form of various political, legal and social dispositions; finally, the feeling of a gradual “invasion” or an imminent upheaval of demographic equilibrium.

From these conceptual delineations one can notice that ethnocentrism and xenophobia have similar elements with racism, but are not identical with it. The differences are both in content as well as in terms of their origin. Regarding the content, racism is more than ethnocentrism or xenophobia, because it refers not only to feelings, attitudes and behavior, but also to an ideology, in the sense of a – often elaborated – worldview, that can become a doctrine. There are no ideologies or doctrines of xenophobia or ethnocentrism, but of racism (Priester, 1997: 13). In other words, racism involves ethnocentric and xenophobic views, but it is more than a rejection of the foreigners (xenophobia in a broader sense) or “self-preference” of one’s own group and undervaluation of others (ethnocentrism in a broader sense). According to Taguieff (1988), racism also implicates a “fear of mixing” or implies a “mixophobia” – a term introduced by Taguieff (1988: 353) in order to denominate this fear and subsequently a “sacralization of the differences”. Beyond the convictions of the superiority of one’s own group and xenophobia, racism presupposes a fear of “mixing”.

In terms of the origin and history of the three terms, many authors (Memmi, 1972; Taguieff, 1988; Priester, 1997; Fredrickson, 2011) consider that ethnocentrism and xenophobia exist since ancient times and they are universal phenomena, common to all human beings. While the emergence of racism can be dated, this is not possible with xenophobia (Memmi, 1972: 915). Fredrickson (2011: 193) emphasizes that, compared with xenophobia, racism is a historical construct “whose career can be traced over the period from the 14th to the 21st century”. According to the same author, ethnocentrism and xenophobia could be seen as a precursor of racism in many respects (ibid.: 231). However, Taguieff (2005c: 566) questions whether the “mixophobic” attitude, which is specific to racism, is indeed a social-historical construction, or is also an universal attitude spread throughout the human species. This still remains a topic of discussion among scientists.

2. Cultural racism – an overview

In the following section are presented various aspects and explanations regarding racism in present. There are brought into focus especially the concept of “cultural racism” and the main processes of racist thinking: essentialization, absolutization and reductionism.

2.1 From biological inequalities to cultural differences. Towards a definition of cultural racism

„Classical” racism, which focuses on the concept of biological inequality, was characterized by the support of state and law, explicit examples being the national socialist government in Germany, racial separation laws in the American Southern States up to the 1960s, and the regime of apartheid in South Africa. However, as Fredrickson (2011: 13) notes, racism is not a phenomenon of the past, because it does not need this state and legal support, nor is it an ideology of biological differentiation and inequality. Forms of discrimination and rejection of people emerge or even flourish, including in societies free from racism (ibid.). It is a matter of attitudes and behaviors of rejection and that does not necessarily rely on biology in order to underpin the subordination of some people or groups of people. Instead, the ethno-cultural origin is absolutized to discriminate, marginalize, segregate, exclude, or exile (Taguieff, 2005b: 499). These attitudes and behaviours are called cultural racism (ibid.).

Above all, this phenomenon has emerged in connection with the “problem” of immigrants (ibid.), that is, as a reference to “supposedly deep-seated cultural differences” (Fredrickson, 2011: 13), in order to justify the hostility against these and their discrimination. What is reproached to some categories of immigrants is the fact that they are not culturally “assimilable” and consequently constitute a danger of disorder for society and for the national group (Taguieff, 2005b: 500). In his analysis of the new current forms of racism, P. A. Taguieff (2005b) uses the term “neo-racism”, more exactly, “differentialist cultural neo-racism” to specifically designate this global phenomenon, this emerging ideological configuration. Taguieff sees in the “racism against immigrants” only an illustration, among others, of precisely the neo-racism.

The numerous situations in which people are rejected, discriminated or expelled show that racism can also be based on other than biological grounds, especially with respect to cultural differences and ethnic or ethno-national identities. This phenomenon can come up to the extent that groups of people are essentialized, the differences are absolutized and declared as “innate, indelible and unchangeable” (Fredrickson, 2011: 15) and allegedly antagonistic in relation to the “predominant culture” (Taguieff, 2005b: 500). This is denominated by Taguieff (ibid.) as a “cultural / ethnic heterophobia”. That is internal and selective, and works neither because of the idea of the “races”, nor because of the emphasizing of some inequalities, but because of the essentialization and absolutizing of the differences between groups of people. As in biological racism, the fear of mixing is also present in the cultural (neo) racism because this “mixing” (or “hybridization”) would be supposedly destructive for the “pure identity” (ibid.: 501) of the prevailing group. The “mixophobia” requires the effort to distance oneself from the “others” or simply to eliminate them.

This (neo) racism may not highlight inequalities but differences, it does not lack though the construction of a permanent hierarchy of different groups of people. That happens because some people and groups are regarded as not “adapting/ fitting” to the prevailing national culture. It reflects the assumption, which can be regarded as strategic and instrumental overestimation, that these groups, which are characterized by diverse “other” cultural characteristics, cannot “integrate” in the prevailing culture, and consequently a coexistence with them is impossible.

In this point of view one can see that – although the term “racism” has an inescapably linguistic link with that of “race” – (neo) racism/ cultural racism is not based

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on “races” but on culturalistic essentialized groups of people. Therefore emerged the term “racism without races”, which is also used to designate the new racist manifestations.

As Fredrickson (2011: 232) points out, “culture can be essentialized to such an extent that it has the same deterministic effect as the skin color”. However – in order to avoid confusion between racism and ethnocentrism and “to speak truly about racism” (ibid.) –, Fredrickson considers that two additional elements are necessary. On one hand, there should be present a conviction that the differences between the ethnic groups are permanent and indelible. Otherwise – if conversion or assimilation is a real possibility – we can talk about cultural or religious intolerance, but not about racism (ibid.: 233). On the other hand, there must be a political and social aspect of ideology, that is, an “exercise of power in the name of a «race» and the resulting patterns of domination or exclusion” (ibid.). According to Fredrickson (2011), the (neo) racism/ cultural racism can be defined as the phenomenon which appears “when an ethnic group or a historical collective attempts to dominate, exclude or eliminate another group on the basis of differences, which are considered hereditary and immutable” (ibid.: 233).

2.2 Essentialization, reductionism, absolutization – processes of cultural racism

In all noticeable aspects racist thinking appears as a paradigmatic representation of essentialist thinking, since it implies at the same time a somatic-biological essentialization of different “Others”, and a permanent segregationist behavior (Guillaumin, 1972: 77-78). Essentialization refers to the tendency to construct substantial genera / species (“Jew”, “Black”, “Aryan”, etc.) by considering the visible differences as permanent and unambiguous signs of belonging to one or the other category (Taguieff, 1988: 155). This leads to a transition from a distinct physical aspect to a specific genetic substance and furthermore to different mental abilities and skills (ibid.: 156; Taguieff, 1997: 65-66). The criteria, as proved by the visible differences, which are regarded as natural and unchangeable, and on the basis of which the essentialist categorizations and classifications are developed, can vary and they can be both phenotypical and cultural (Taguieff, 2005a: 38).

Thus, the process of essentialization means, on one hand, to accept only one or some of the characteristics of human groups as essential, and furthermore to assign other specific features or abilities to these groups by virtue of these essential characteristics. On the other hand, all members of these groups are considered alike/equal, the differences within the groups are homogenized (Mac to Ghail, 1999: 10), the multiplicity of the individual features is not considered and the situational factors are neglected (Taguieff, 2005b: 510). In the construction of the essentialized human identity it is appealed to firm or essential characteristics which are supposed to persist continually (Mac an Ghail, 1999: 7).

Basically essentialization requires a double process of reductionism: people are reduced to one or a few (“significant / enduring / inherent”) characteristic(s), whereas human groups are reduced to uniform, homogeneous, one-dimensional collectivities. In this way, for example, all migrants would be similar, and they would be culturally incompatible or incapable of integrating into the dominant culture, and are therefore of concern to society.

In addition, besides essentialization and reductionism, a process of absolutizing the differences contributes to cultural racism. In the light of the fact that in neo-racism the differences and not the inequalities are emphasized, Taguieff (1988) introduces the concept of “differential neo-racism” to describe the present racist phenomenon. Cultural

differences can be both perceived and simply invented, and are absolutized to such an extent that they appear as irreconcilable. The coexistence of the people who belong to different cultural groups appears to be not only problematic but also impossible. Therefore, cultural racism (Taguieff, 2005b: 501) implies an absolutizing of perceived or invented differences between essentialized groups of people.

3. Approaches to current racism: is cultural racism a new phenomenon, or is it a manifestation of (proto) racism?

As already mentioned, there is a risk of ambiguity when using the concept of racism, because its extent was overexpanded to describe various forms of discrimination and exclusion, as well as ethnocentrism and xenophobia. Furthermore, it has been shown that in the present a new form of racism is emerging – or at least defined as such – namely cultural racism. This phenomenon is often designated also by terms such as neo-racism, differentialist racism, or racism without races. Under these circumstances there is a question which is still controversial in the various scientific disciplines: is this (new) phenomenon indeed a form of racism, or is it something different, for which perhaps another concept should be used? This question was raised with regard to racism as early as the beginning of the '80s (Taguieff, 2005b: 499). Assuming that the term of “cultural (neo) racism” is adopted, some clarifications are necessary regarding its conceptual value and its empirical validity.

3.1 Arguments for the thesis of a new, different phenomenon

When approaching racism, one should outline and establish an analytical framework and rely on a coherent definition of racism. Proto-racism or biological, “classical” racism was defined as an ideology based on biological or genetic criteria. If one chooses this analytical framework, racism is understood in a narrow sense, as in the earlier mentioned definitions and approaches of Miles and Lévi-Strauss. They emphasize the role of biological criteria in the ideological construction of racism.

In this analytical framework, the thesis that cultural racism should not be classified in the generic conception of racism appears to be justified, since it lacks basic elements: in pointing out the differences, it does not refer to the (biologically assigned) “races”, but to essentialized groups of people; it does not presuppose “racialism” or “racialization”; it does not appeal to biology or genetics to argue the existence of hierarchies and superiority/ inferiority, but to the absolutizing of cultural differences in order to establish the supposed incompatibilities, etc. While cultural racism resembles classical, biological racism in terms of its manifestations, its affiliated practices, the implied emotions or passions (such as hatred, fear, contempt, etc.), the consequences, yet – in this analytical framework – they are different phenomena, because they are based on different ideologies. And assuming that racism is primarily understood as an ideology, and this ideology originates from biological criteria, cultural racism would be excluded from the “umbrella” of racism.

Another argument relates to the fact that the use of the term “racism” could be misleading, given its link with the ideas of classical racism, namely, the biological criteria on the basis of which human beings were hierarchized, the existence of “races” and the justification of racial classifications, etc. Thus, the term “racism” should only be used to describe what it originally defined (i.e., what biological/ genetic racism depicted). For the new phenomenon, which is based on cultural criteria, a new concept should be developed.

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Finally, a linguistic argument must be mentioned: one cannot help not to establish a link between the words “race” and “racism”. Since the new racism no longer puts the “race” up for discussion – a term which has fallen into disgrace anyway –, the reuse of the concept of racism appears justified only in a metaphorical sense (as in “racism without races”), but not in the scientific analytical frameworks. Under these assumptions, the use of the term “racism” would be inappropriate.

3.2 Arguments for the thesis of one and the same phenomenon

If one proceeds from a comprehensive scope of the concept of racism, as the above-mentioned definition of G.M. Fredrickson (2011), then cultural racism is only a manifestation of racism, and the only difference compared to biological racism would be the criteria which are used to determine and justify the differentiation and hierarchization of human groups. It would be one and the same ideology that propagates differences, inequalities, discrimination and abuses of some categories of people, apart from the fact that it is not based on the idea of the “race”, but rather the “culture”. The “race” or other “encodings” of the “race” represent a pretense for differentiation and hierarchization, and in this case the pretexts are not essential, but what they cause: assignment of (negative) characteristics to some groups of people, attitudes, behaviors and actions against these people, which emerge as exclusion, discrimination, exploitation or expulsion. In this respect, it is not the differentiation criteria that come to the fore, but the manifestations, practices, and consequences, which are the same.

Culture can be to such an extent “reified and essentialized that it becomes the functional equivalent of the concept of «race» (...). A deterministic cultural particularism can have the same effects as a biologically based racism” (Fredrickson 2011: 18).

Provided that “mixophobia” (fear of mixing and of harm of the “purity of descendance”) is common to both biological and cultural (neo) racism, Taguieff (2005c) argues that the difference between them does not refer to the foundation, but apparently to the form and rank, in that cultural racism can be interpreted as an “euphemism of biological racism” (Taguieff, 2005c: 564).

Furthermore, other arguments for the thesis of the expression of the same phenomenon relate to the fact that cultural racism is not entirely lacking (pseudo) biological elements. J. Solomos and L. Back (1996) consider that “race” is nowadays coded as “culture”, and the central feature of this process is that it “fixes and naturalizes the characteristics of social groups, and it is embedded in a pseudo-biologically defined culturalism” (quoted by Fredrickson, 2011: 18-19).

On the other hand, different viewpoints suggest that – conversely – “classic” biological racism also referred to cultural and differential parameters. M. Wiewiorka (1995) doubts that cultural or differential perspectives are new in racism. He mentions that the ideology of anti-Semitism in the Third Reich appealed to cultural elements, for example, by considering that Jews “corrupted the Aryan culture and race”. Therefore the “final solution” regarding them was not to give them the lowest place in society, but to destroy them. According to Wiewiorka, there exists only one racism that often combines different versions of the association of cultural differentialism and social unegalitarianism. Likewise, M.J. Hickman (1995), based on an analysis of racism in the UK, found that both anti-Semitism and racism against Irish show that there is nothing new in terms of cultural differentiation as the basis for racist discourse in this country.

In addition, K. Priester (1997) also argues that cultural racism is not a new or different phenomenon, because racism has always been culturally and differentialist.

From the beginning, modern racism has not only biologically argued (*in the original underlined*). Recognized racial ideologists (...) have always sustained – independently of any biological “natural selection” optic – the possibility of an “inner Judaism”, namely the adaptation of non-Jews to so-called Jewish behaviors through cultural contact. Even in paroxysmically intensified Nazi racism, the moment of the cultural (*i.o.u.*) differentness of the Jews and other discriminated minorities was always present (...). When the Nazis set out to define who was a Jew at all, they took as a basis a cultural (*i.o.u.*) trait, which was designated by the religious affinity in the third generation (...). And even regarding the Sinti and Roma the focus was not on their biological “race” but on their culture, their way of life, their customs and traditions as “travelling people” (Priester, 1997: 25).

In reflection of this thesis racism is a combination of biological and cultural arguments, some of these being highlighted. Therefore, there exist different manifestations of this phenomenon. Moreover, the term “race” as such is not essential; its meaning can be coded as “culture”. Racist attitudes and practices can only work on the symbolic level.

Discussion and conclusions

The main focus of this paper was the concept of cultural/ differential (neo) racism and the question of the extent to which cultural racism differs from “classical” (proto) racism. As a first conclusion, it can be stated that the term “racism” is one of the most controversial and ambiguous concepts in social sciences. The phenomenon of racism can be assessed in a broad range of understandings, from narrow definitions, which consider racism merely as a representational phenomenon, as an ideology that uses one or more biological features as a criterion for describing collective groups in order to undertake racial construction, to comprehensive definitions, which take into account not only the ideological content of racism, but also its specific emerging attitudes and actions, as well as the forms and practices of discrimination that are justified thereby. However, it can be concluded that when racism is analyzed, one should resort to a clear and coherent conceptual framework to delimit racism from other phenomena such as ethnocentrism or xenophobia.

It was delineated that if racism would be understood with the “classical”, biological meaning, it would not be a significant social and political phenomenon in present. However, it has been ascertained that racism is not an issue of the past, and the “era of racism” is not over, since other forms of racism, not necessarily relying on biology, but especially on “culture”, emerged and are even – still – flourishing. It is still debated, whether these forms of racism, which essentialize cultural characteristics, reduce human groups on homogeneous, one-dimensional collectivities and absolutize ethnicity and cultural differences, represent actually another phenomenon, or merely different manifestations, with different stresses and accentuations, of the same “old/ classical” racism. It has been shown that there are different views that put arguments in place to sustain one or other of these positions.

However, it is not the existence of the phenomenon of cultural racism queried, which has resembling forms, practices and consequences as biological racism, but the accuracy of using the term “racism” for its description. It can be argued relevantly in both directions. For example, there is a reason to omit the term “racism” on grounds of its

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misleading due to its link with the concept of “race” and the idea of racial construction and classifications based on various biological criteria. On the other hand, there are several argumentations for the fact that both biological and cultural racism represent one and the same ideology – only differently justified – and therefore the term “racism” should be maintained. Starting from such conceptions, one should be less concerned with the ontological question of whether “races” actually exist or not, and instead should focus on the impact of the ideology. In this respect, racism is a combination of biological and cultural ideological arguments, coming into different manifestations by emphasizing some of these arguments. In addition, “race” is nowadays encoded as “culture”, and culture can be essentialized to such an extent that it has the same deterministic effects as skin color or other biological differentiation criteria.

In conclusion, the debates about racism continue in the present, and they still create different theoretical assumptions and approaches. However, in order to outline a coherent scientific framework with regard to cultural racism, as well as to other terms that are based on contemporary racism, questions that require further investigation are emerging. They refer, on one hand, to theoretical approaches and more precise explanations regarding the factors that maintain racism and contribute to racist thinking, provided that on the legal and “objective” levels racism should no longer exist. On the other hand, there would be investigations necessary that could yield practical and feasible findings and results needful for effective anti-racist strategies and measures.

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