Ethnocentric, everyday racism
– An outline of a conceptualisation of racism

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After the UNESCO declaration in 1960s stating that the concept 'race' is biologically and scientifically flawed, the concept of racism has been challenged and modified in several different ways. According to the classical definition of racism, valid primarily for the period before the UNESCO declaration, racism is:

the doctrine that a man's behaviour is determined by stable inherited characters deriving from separate racial stocks having distinctive attributes and usually considered to stand to one another in relations of superiority and inferiority. (Banton, 1970, 18 in Miles, 1989, 47)

This has also been called scientific racism, where divisions of peoples into different categories and hierarchies between these categories were motivated scientifically.

As natural science and the Unesco declaration stated that races do not exist in objective nature, racism was considered consequently to be dead [as a concept and phenomenon] by some analysts (Cf. Banton, 1970). After this there has been many attempts to change the concept in order to describe situations of ethnic prejudices or discrimination that are motivated on different and varying grounds. According to John Rex:

[--] the common element in all these [racist] theories is that they see the connection between membership of a particular group and of the genetically related subgroups (i.e. families and lineages) of which that group is compounded as completely deterministic. It doesn't really matter whether this is because of men's genes, because of the history to which their ancestors have been exposed, because of the nature of their culture or because of divine decree. (Rex, 1970, 159 in Miles, 1989, 49)

One important common element in the definitions above is that they refer to an ideology in a more narrow, political sense, i.e. some kind of doctrine. However, the definition of racism, especially in relation to the Finnish case, but even more generally in these late modern times of life-politics and decreesing expert influence (cf. Giddens, 1991), should be referring to ideology in a broader sense, a more micro sociological or phenomenological sense. Drawing on Peter Berger:

Sociologists speak of 'ideology' in discussing views that serve to rationalize the vested interests of some group. Very frequently such views systematically distort social reality [--] (Berger, 1963, 54)

But

it is [--] important to keep the concept ideology distinct from notions of lying, deception, propaganda or leger-demain. The liar, by definition knows that he is lying. The ideologist does not. (Berger, 1963, 131)

This broad way of considering ideology suggests the relevance of ethnocentrism in discussing racism. It follows from this insight that normality and "common sense" are ideological. By common sense and normality I refer to the everyday experience of obviousness in interpersonal encounters, where every detail does not

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have to be explicitely described and defined in order to create intersubjectivity and to solve practical tasks at hand.

The classical definition of ethnocentrism by W.G. Sumner, can serve as a departure point in the creation of a new definition of racism, applicable for Finnish circumstances. Etnocentrism is:

a view of things in which one's own group is the centre of everything, and all others are scaled and rated with reference to it. Each group nourishes its own pride and vanity, boasts itself superior, exalts its own divinities, and looks with contempt on outsiders. (Sumner, 1906, cited in Duckitt, 1992, 7 and in Liebkind, 1988, 24)

It is important that the prefix ethno, has to refer to ethnicity or to what is popularly, though scientifically falsely, called 'race'. This does not imply an essentialist view on ethnicity, but allowes the processual approach on ethnicity where it refers to socially constructed ethnic relations. Another important issue is that racism is an outward directed negative ethnocentrism, which hierarchisizes different groups in relation to the ingroup of the racist individual.

Etnocentrism is not synonymous with racism and includes much else that can not be regarded as belonging to the same onthological space, such as its emphasis on the in-group instead of the outgroup. Racism in its turn refers traditionally to something else than ethnocentrism, in addition to its outgroup directedness and labelling practice, for example to historical relations such as slavery and colonialism.

For the pupose of creating applicability in the Finnish case, it is crucial that ethnocentrism refers to everyday ways of thought constructed in the common sense of everyday life. This is in my view the most central part in what currently should be called racism, especially regarding Finland where racism as a more narrow, political doctrine or a historical relationship is less visible.[1] Intergroup hostility in Finland is a rather banal and nondramatic phenomenon, with less flag waving and more ridiculing jokes and moral anger directed against other nationalities (Cf. Puuronen, 2002).

Ethnocentric racism has following general features: Everything that breaks with the order of everyday normality is reacted against with suspicion. When "the other" is historically presented as superior (such as western Europeans) the etnocentricism seldom becomes aggressive. The racistic element of negativeness in the etnocentric outgroup directedness is related to the historical institutionalisation of group relations and consequently to power (Berger & Luckmann, 1971). Simoultaneously the conclusion by Satu Apo of the selfracism of Finnish people can be understood with the etnocentric view on racism. In elite constructions of Finnish cultural nationhood there is historically no etnocentrism, but the opposite; a ridiculing of Finnish cultural patterns in relation to more civilized Swedes and Europeans (Apo, 1998, 83–128).

There have been usages such as symbolic, structural, institutional and cultural racism refering also to other dimensions than ways of thought, such as discriminatory practices or historical intergroup relations. These approaches have produced a reasonable amount of research which in many European cases have proved fruitful for the understanding of racism. In the Finnish case, however, I do not find them for the time being very useful, of the following reasons:

- Finland does not have a history as a colonial power: Finnishness has not become a valuable cultural capital with which symbolic violence could be used against "the other". Finnishness is a small, isolated cultural phenomenon which rather represents "the other" for central and western Europe and even for itself (Alasuutari & Ruuska, 1998).
- There has been only small scale immigration to Finland during the 20th century and only few, small visible ethnic minorities – No institutionalisation of the presence of "the other" and no long-time institutionalisation of asymmetry or hierarchy has taken place. The sami and gypsy (cf. Thörn, 2002, 96–97) are exceptions,[2] which can be understood also in relation to the creation of the modern nation state, a pervasive machinery.
- No strong and well-organized extreme rightist political movements with clear ideological doctrines exist. In Finland egalitarianism (tasavalta) and the civil society are historically speaking strong and the latter has played a central role in the nation-building process. Consequently the state and its po-

litical culture are not obviously reflecting narrow ideological doctrines, but more ”common sense and folkways”.

Notes

1 In other words, epistemologically, the sociology of knowledge (Berger & Luckmann, 1971) and phenomenology (Schutz, 1970) constitute a theoretical approach through which racism in my view could be understood.

2 Perhaps these, however, are different phenomena, related to different periods of nation-state development. The first one to modern nation-state construction, the second; immigration relating to nation-state defence against globalistic pressures and fragmentation.

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