CERS Working Paper 2016

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Race and Racialisation: The formation and transformation of the Kingdom of Belgium

Contents

Introduction

A debate persists in the sociological study of global racism, wherein scholars contest the origins of racism and how it has spread across the map (Dikotter, 2008; Goldberg, 2006; Isaac, 2001; Law, 2009; Law, 2015). A strand of this debate argues that the Western world introduced racism and disseminated it to the rest of the world during its period of modernity. Scholars that argue this go as far back as W.E.B DuBois, in the early 20th century – the 'first sociologist of race' – who explained race as a construct of modernity (Law, 2009). DuBois' ideas have persisted and are emulated by contemporary scholars, such as D.T. Goldberg, who, in *Racial Europeanization* (2006), argues "classic racisms from the onset of modernity in the late fifteenth century were formed and fashioned in the contexts of European expansion, enslavement, and colonization" (pg.331). Goldberg and DuBois see racism as being a product of Western (specifically, Western European) modernity. This sociological tradition is called monoracism and it posits "a linear development of Western racisms from the classical world onwards and outwards" (Law, 2015).

The other side of this argument argues that they do not delve into history enough, nor look widely enough, in explaining the origins of racist ideology. Law (2015) argues for the concept of polyracism "which involves moving beyond the partial, limited account of global racialisation". Racism existed in pre-modern Europe in the classical Graeco-Roman world (lasting until approximately the 5th century AD) (Isaac, 2004) and other forms of racialisation were prevalent across the globe, as seen in the use of colour symbolism by American Indians and in China, pre-European-contact (Dikotter, 2008, pg.1482-1483). Hence, the question Law asks is "why restrict our deconstruction of racial logics to the operation of Western capitalist modernity and liberal democracies?", when indeed the practice of racism goes beyond that spatial and temporal point (2015). Hence, polyracism argues for multiple origins of racism in different forms, as opposed to the tradition of monoracism that underpins the positions of DuBois and Goldberg (Law, 2015).

Unlike monoracism, polyracism acknowledges the existence of different modernities, in what is known as polycentrism (Law, 2015) This highlights a key limitation to the study of race that monoracism creates. By arguing racism began with Western Europe, monoracism homogenises Western Europe, by placing the modernity of all states in the region at the same point. Therefore, research on the interactive spread of racist practices *within* Western Europe has been sparse. Even scholars who argue for a global polycentric history (Mignolo, 2011; Dikotter, 2008) have hardly disproved the presupposition that Western Europe is a region with a shared modernity.

For example, Belgium's modernity happened at a much later stage to the rest of the region but in a similar and much quicker way, as a result of its late formation. Belgium was influenced by the racist practices of its neighbours during this period of its development. Racism developed Belgium's modernity, contrary to the understanding of Western Europe's modernity creating racism. The differences in the modernising period seem almost non-existent in modern scholarship, however. This is due to the modern similarities in regards to political anti-racism amongst Western Europe's states. Consequently, this essay will:

1. show that modernity within this region might be better explained using the polycentric position (this will be done in section 1 –Formation);

2. argue for the interactive model of the spread of racism within Western Europe – that is, the "indigenization and appropriation of racist belief systems" that originated elsewhere (Dikotter, 2008, pg.1482) (this will also be done in section 1 – 'Formation');

3. explore how the trajectories of the polycentric states have aligned to the contemporary (in section 2 – 'Transformation in the 20th century', and in section 3 –'The Anti-Racism Project in Belgium').

The essay will also conclude whether similar contemporary practice is the reason why Western Europe's history has been homogenised, then suggest ways the study of race can advance beyond the monoracism-polyracism debate. To do this, the essay will consider the way in which race and racialisation has formed and transformed the Kingdom of Belgium.

In order to come to the theoretical conclusion that is the aim of this essay, by assessing all necessary points, broadness in research will be needed and might sometimes come at the cost of depth in analysis. This does not imply that some issues related to the Belgian practice of racism in the empirical sense, but the issues are only being presented purely to advance the theoretical discussion rather than as individual topics. Moreover, the analysis will focus solely on the meso and macro level interactions in order to explore the trajectories of racism within Belgium and Western Europe.

Section 1 – Formation

Modernity, Imperialism and Racism

Western modernity, at the broadest, is the rise of capitalism as the dominant economic concept, and the scientific revolution, from the 16th century onwards, leading to developments in spheres of knowledge, and politics and economics (Mignolo, 2011), in what became broadly known as the Enlightenment . The outcomes of it are identified by Mignolo (2011, pg.7) as:

"the emergence of a structure of control and management of authority, economy, subjectivity, gender and sexual norms and relations that were driven by Western (Atlantic) Europeans (Iberian Peninisual, Holland, France, and England) both in their internal conflicts and in their exploitation of labor and expropriation of land"

Modernity also had a "hidden dimension". In order to expand in the economic and knowledge spheres, human life needed to be sacrificed and people had to be oppressed – thus, as Mignolo (2011, pg.6) highlights, "hidden behind the rhetoric of modernity, economic practices dispersed with human lives, and knowledge justified racism and the inferiority of human lives that were naturally considered dispensable". The monoracist argument is that this "hidden dimension" makes Western modernity the sole source of contemporary racism, whereas the polyracist argument suggests this is just one of the sources.

Neither side of the debate would dispute that the practices of racialisation – identifying groups based on perceived racial differences and attributing hierarchies (which are legitimised through stereotypes) – have played pivotal roles in the formation of Western Europe (Macmaster, 2001). During the transatlantic slave trade, implicit racism – "locates 'difference' through cultural, institutional and environmental criteria rather than genetic properties" (Hobson, 2004, pg.220) – justified the hierarchy of the civilised white Western Europe against black Africa. This does not imply equality within or amongst the slave trading states, but that these states felt themselves culturally and morally superior to the 'uncivilised' areas of the world they stole from, thus legitimising the slave trade. With the demise of slavery and the rise of colonialism, European enlightenment's impact on implicit racism grew clear. The mantra that justified the colonial period was indeed "to educate and enlighten non-Christians, or "heathens"" (Hossain, 2003), implying cultural superiority (racism). The onset of scientific racism, which began to take hold in the 1840s, is the explicit racism that gave empirical weight to the difference that was implied in implicit racism. Though scientific racial hierarchies were being researched as early as 1735 by Carl Linnaeus in *Systema Naturae*, it was not until works such as *The Origin of Species* (Charles Darwin (1859)) and *Hereditary Genius* by eugenicists Francis Galton (1869) were published

that colonial powers scientifically proved that the black human was truly the lowest form of human, or that it was indeed inhuman (Hossain, 2003; Hobson, 2004).

Through this, the black body "represented the paradigm of racial Otherness, the marker of that which was most physically, mentally and culturally different from the 'civilized' European" (Macmaster, 2001, pg.58). Therefore, just as implicit racism – civilisational superiority/inferiority – justified slavery and fed into early colonial logic, subsequently explicit racism gave weight to nineteenth century colonialism and imperialism. These practices promoted by Western Europe's imperial powers had their roots in the global 'philanthropy' of enlightenment, wherein it was a mission of civilising and spreading Christianity, followed by the scientific advances (again made possible by perceived superior ideals) that sought to prove the natural biological and hierarchical difference that is 'race'. These racist practices legitimised brutal centuries of exploitation and violence within Africa for the sake of technologically and economically modernising Western Europe. Particularly, the era of industrialisation was made possible due to the mass resource extraction in Africa and other colonies. The way the colonies were managed highlights that control of these regions was solely for resource extraction and the maintaining of these colonies was only possible due to violence and racialisation (Macmaster, 2001).

To cover the precise history of modernity, enlightenment, and imperialism within Western Europe would require more depth than can be sacrificed. This brief summary shows the links between these elements to support the claim by monoracist theorists that racism has a place in the development of Western Europe's modernity. This claim is one accepted by polyracist scholars as well. Nevertheless, the summary does not provide an explanation for the complexity of the manner in which implicit and explicit racism was created and promulgated within Western Europe. The spread of racism was an interactive process. Enlightenment took different forms within the region and across the centuries and the transfer of racist ideas occurred within and without the region known as Western Europe.

This interactive transfer within Western Europe is highlighted using a case study of modernity and of the Kingdom of Belgium. A kingdom that came to be recognised as a sovereign entity in 1839, Belgium had missed the enlightenment that began in the 16[th]c and should have had no part in the development of the racist practices that the region is known for. However, the racialisation that took place in its own modernity greatly mirrors those used during the slave trade and those that were being used by its neighbours. It begins in 1885 with the formation of the Congo Free State – King Leopold II's privately controlled area of Central Africa, which gained international infamy for the millions of black lives lost to satisfy Belgian trade interests (Macmaster, 2001; Hoschild, 2006). Hoschild's critical, historical analysis of the Congo Free State in *King Leopold's Ghost* (2006), notes that Leopold knew that "if he was to seize anything in Africa, he could do so only if he convinced everyone that his interest was purely altruistic" (pg.46). Leopold II set up the International African Association to front his 'civilising' mission as he presented himself as a philanthropist and a liberator of Africans from Arab slave traders. The logic that Africans needed civilising and were helpless against the more 'white-passing' Arabs (who would have been higher on Linnaeus' or Galton's respective classifications of humans), combined with the egoism of a white burden to develop others, shows that Leopold II's reasoning is directly parallel with the implicit and explicit racism that was being used by the rest of Western Europe to create empires. However, many Europeans were convinced that they were doing a great service to the rest of the world (Hobson, 2004); whereas the obvious exploitative intentions of Leopold II evidences the interactive transfer of racist ideas as it showed the King as having learned from that practice of implicit racism and was appropriating it to suit his personal greed.

Leopold II's greed manifested itself in the trade of the highly commodified rubber and it was the cause of the worst atrocities in the Congo Free State (Hoschild, 2005; 2006). "The development of pneumatic bicycle tyres in the 1890s, along with increases in the industrial use of rubber for such items as hose, tubing, springs, washers, and diaphragms, created a rising demand [for rubber]" and the Congo Free State was the largest supplier of it, followed by French Guinea and Angola (Harms, 1975, pg.74). The rubber trade demanded death from African colonies. The depletion of nearby saps meant the forced

African labourers of the Congo Free State had to venture further into the jungles for fresh trees to meet their quotas. Women were held hostage, men were worked to death, birth rates plunged, and dissenters were mutilated and massacred – indeed there was a handbook on violently managing the colony and taking hostages issued (Hoschild, 2005; 2006). Approximately ten million people died. Meanwhile, the Congo Free State became "the most profitable colony in Africa", with the harvest of rubber turning a profit of over 700 percent (Hoschild, 2006, pg.160). Leopold's amassed fortune from the colony totalled $1.1billion modern dollars (Hoschild, 2005). The money was invested into public works in Belgium, all of which transferred to state ownership following Leopold's death (Blane, 2001; Reader, 1998). Even when the Congo Free State fell as Leopold's privately managed property and transferred to the Belgian state as a colony in 1908, the exploitation did not stop. For the 52 years since, until the independence in 1960, Belgium continued to profit from the region, because, as Hoschild writes, "as long as there was big money to be made from rubber, white men, with the help of the gun and the *chicotte,* would force black men to gather it" (2006, pg.271). Labour was forced, not through hostage taking, but loaning Congo out to the Congolese and enslaving them through tax and rent. In this way, ideas of race already existing in Western Europe influenced Leopold II. He used these ideas of race to justify an exploitation of Congo and began a personal project of economic modernisation through public works. Following his death, the state acquired this role and profited directly through the Congo and the racist system set up by Leopold II. Thus, a clear link exists between racism and modernity in regards to the Kingdom of Belgium. The existence of implicit racist ideas were used by Leopold II and sustained by the state to form its economic modernity, contrary to the theory of a homogenised Western European modernity. Furthermore, if Belgium is able to build on existing ideas of racial practice, then it is not beyond the rest of Western Europe to do the same, by taking ideas from classical antiquity or other parts of the world. Apart from advancing the theoretical debate, the Congo Free State is also significant because it highlights a debt in millions of lives and dollars (at the most conservative estimate) that can never be repaid. This debt is owed by the Kingdom of Belgium to Congo after it bought its modernity through the theft of lives and resources. It may be at this point that the trajectories of Belgium began to align with its neighbours, because, when it comes to colonial debts, much of Western Europe has its unpaid shares.

Section 2 – Transformation in the 20th century

Exploring how racism has formed Belgium has shown the region of Western Europe to be more polycentric than scholars of monoracism would concede. Despite this, the region is still highly homogenised in theory, and this may be due to the aligned trajectories that they currently have, despite modernising in different ways. For Belgium, the implicit cultural racism that formed its modernity continued into the 20th century. However, it came from the local populace – as they attempted to display some cultural indigeneity – as a response to the waves of migration into the country.

The immediate post-Second World War period saw an influx of migrants from other European countries, particularly Poles and Italians; then North Africans, especially Moroccans, and Turks, started arriving as dominant migrant groups, in the 1960s (De Lannoy and Lombaert, 2015; Fleischmann et al, 2012). This pattern of migration was apparent through the region as these immigrants, from economies facing low growth and high unemployment, were responding to the labour needs of Western Europe (Garson and Loizillon, 2003; Fleischmann et al, 2012). The migration waves were similar across the region, though they differed in demographics. Dustmann and Frattini (2012) note that "the movement was one from Southern Europe, as well as non-European Mediterranean countries" (pg.5) but a dominant proportion of migrants were from former colonies, such as the commonwealth countries for the United Kingdom (West Africa and the Caribbean, particularly); Algeria for France; and Indonesia for the Netherlands. The entire region of Western Europe was transformed by this migration for the better, in what became known as the "Trente Glorieuses", which refers to the 25-30 years of unparalleled growth (late 1940s to early 1970s) that came as a result (Garson and Loizillon, 2003, pg.2). Though there were other key factors involved in Western Europe's recovery, such as the Marshall Plan, for a country like Belgium, which recovered primarily through industrial exports (Cassiers et al, 1996) without the labour, its economy might not have been transformed as much as it did. The necessity of this labour force was constant across the region through the mid-20th century as they acted as a "'reserve army' of mobile, flexible labour that could be put to work on the back-breaking and dangerous tasks that Europeans were

refusing to take on" at a low cost (Macmaster, 2001, pg.174). For a while, it seems that Belgium and its neighbours were developing affluent and equal societies with "a remarkable degree of social and political stability" (Betz, 1993, pg.413).

However, like much of Western Europe, the economic downturn that occurred as a result of the oil crisis of the mid-1970s saw the once freer borders of Belgium begin to close off, with 25,000 less work permits being issued compared to the mid-1960s (Garson and Loizillon, 2003; Martiniello and Rea, 2003). Across Western Europe, the immigrants had been considered to be temporary in order to satisfy demands for unskilled labour, in hopes that they would leave after the growth demands had been met (Dustmann and Frattini, 2012). Instead, migrant communities swelled due to family reunification. By the early 1980s, Western Europe's foreign population had tripled since 1950 (Garson and Loizillon, 2003). The ensuing economic downturn had led to the once necessary migrant population being seen as the scourge of Western Europe's society. In Belgium, they became "political scapegoats for persistent unemployment at the time of elections" (Martiniello and Rea, 2003). The political strategy to deal with immigrants began to reflect the implicit cultural racism that was again rearing its head in the kingdom. A policy of coercive expulsion was employed as the government tried to "encourage" immigrants to return to their home countries (Martiniello and Rea, 2003), then another policy of assimilation as they began to provide full citizenship (even to the Belgium-born) on the condition they complete social orientation classes (Zemni, 2011), with the purpose of developing culturally homogenised states based on the indigenous culture. Similar policies were in place across Western Europe as they "reduced or tried to reduce immigration" into their countries (Garson and Loizillon, 2003, pg.3).

The political language of the 1990s emphasised the idea of a unified, homogenous society and deviation from the cultures of this society was to be reduced. In this way, there was a perceived difference between indigenous Belgians and immigrants and the onus was on the latter to learn to live in their society by sacrificing their cultural identity (Zemni, 2011, pg.31). The immigrant hysteria culminated in what was known as 'Black Sunday' in 1991 – the day where the far-right party, Vlaams Blok (Flemish Block), gained significant electoral success (Zemni, 2011). The party is described as having thrived "on

resentment against immigrant communities" and Muslims (as well as those that are *Muslim looking)* (De Lannoy and Lombaert, 2015; Zemni, 2011). Outside of Belgium, the radical populist right-wing made gains in the late 1980s and early 1990s, in Western European elections. Betz (1993) points to the Austrian Freedom Party doubling its electoral support in the 1990s elections; the growth of France's Front National in the first half of the decade; and other similar developments in Germany, Sweden and Switzerland (pp. 413-414). Belgium's political climate was similar to its neighbours, vis-a-vis attitudes to foreigners.

In Belgium, the rise of the Vlaams Blok, as well as the scapegoating of immigrants, and the policies of expulsion and assimilation, signifies the retreat of Belgian politics and society to exclusive notions of identity and indigeneity. Therefore, ideas of implicit cultural racism, that gave way to slavery and colonialism, begin to resurface in Belgium and the rest of Western Europe.. The shared suffering of the World Wars, which led to demand for migrant labour, then a desire for a return to cultural indigeneity, is something the regions countries share, to differing extents (Fleischmann et al, 2012). The debt owed by these states as a result of their colonial legacies is one that seems to have been forgotten as a sense of civilisational superiority returns. Their weak post-war economies were saved by immigrants then, at the sign of economic recession, immigrants became the burdensome *other*. In this way, the trajectories of Western Europe's states and Belgium's have become more aligned due to them having the same economic crises due to the world wars and oil crisis. Despite the polycentric modernity, these large scale economic issues have forced them to take similar stances on foreign populations – stances that signify implicit cultural racism.

Section 3 – The Anti-Racism Project in Belgium

That Belgium has not come to terms with its colonial and immigrant legacy is reflected in the contemporary political attitude of the state. This manifests itself through a denial of the history of the Congo Free State and honouring Leopold II, as well as a lack of discourse regarding race and ethnicity

in political and academic circles. This leads to a legislative and institutional weakness in combatting racism and rising, anti-Muslim, anti-Roma, and anti-foreigner sentiments at a political level.

Academic Spheres

The denial of the history of the Congo Free State began almost immediately after the region fell as Leopold II's personal property in 1908. As the region was now officially a colony of Belgium, its elites fostered a "colonial spirit" by developing a cult of personality around their King to maintain the notion of him as a "genius" and philanthropist (Goddeeris, 2015). Hoschild (2006) highlights this as a "Great Forgetting" of Leopold II's role in the Congo atrocities, with him being presented as a "Builder King". This "forgetting" of their King's legacy as one of history's greatest mass murderers persists until the present day. Referring to the "Memory of Congo: the Colonial era" book and exhibit, in the Royal Museum for Central Africa (RMCA) in 2005, Hoschild writes that there was not a single article or display case to highlight the atrocities committed in the Congo Free State – no mention of "forced labor" or "hostage" could be found (2006, pg.313). Gewald (2006) argues that the Memory of Congo exhibition "attempted to qualify, indeed play down, the colonial past in the Congo" (pg.472). The violence surrounding red rubber is mentioned as being carried out by independent organisations, but not on the scale mentioned by Hoschild – most deaths are attributed to migration and disease. The impression giving by the exhibition is that whatever violence that was committed was actually limited by Leopold II (Gewald, 2006). In an article aptly titled "the hidden holocaust" (1999) the Guardian furthers analysis of Belgium's "Great Forgetting" – referrng to case studies in academic circles, wherein students have been failed for citing Hoschild's book[1]; the few Belgian academics writing before Hoschild being shunned by their seniors.

Certainly, there has been a lack of real academic discourse in the mainstream regarding Belgium's colonial legacy. At the same time, discourse on contemporary racism does not gain traction, either (Goddeeris, 2015; Florence and Martiniello, 2005). "Ethnic and migration studies seem to lack

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[1] The edition used in this essay is the second edition in 2006, but the first was published in 1998.

credibility and social legitimacy in Belgium" (Florence and Martiniello, 2005, pg.51). Sociologists and historians face competition from mainstream media analysts, and any research that challenges the status-quo hardly influences the state's decision making policies. The status-quo here being the politicised nature of the migrant populations – presenting them as an "army" of foreigners planning to invade and ruin Belgium. So, even if historians attempt to present an in-depth historical challenge to the mainstream presentation of Leopold II and the Congo, or sociologists attempt provide independent research on migration, the Belgian media rarely brings their findings to the fore, still preferring to use their own research and publicists (Goddeeris, 2015). In this way, the future of Belgian research into its historical and contemporary racisms seems to be one that will reproduce the mainstream and will influence state policy accordingly.

That mainstream academia has influenced state policy is most immediately evident by the presentation of Leopold II in the country. Goddeeris (2015) points to the honouring of Leopold II being "the sole king with an equestrian memorial in the shadow of the royal palace", with numerous busts and statutes across the country (pg. 449). Yet there remain no monuments to honour the Congolese who suffered for Leopold II's ambitions. Maintaining Leopold's cult is just one of the ways that the Belgian state allows contemporary racism to persist.

Legislative weakness of the anti-racism project

At a systemic level, there is a lack of an effective challenge to racism in Belgium. The unwillingness of the state is reflected in its inability. A 2013 Legal Memorandum on anti-discrimination law in Belgium confirms that the Centre for Equal Opportunities and Opposition to Racism (the Centre) is an independent governmental organisation with the sole purpose of combatting racism and inequality, and provides legal counsel and support to victims of such. However, the Centre's capabilities to fulfil its duties, in compliance to the legal requirements of the Paris Principles - laid out by the UN's High Commissioner for Human Rights – are subpar (OHCHR, 1993). Out of three ranks (A being full compliance, B being limited compliance, and C being complete non-compliance) the Centre only managed a ranking of 'B' (ICC, 2014).

The same Legal Memorandum that confirms the roles of the Centre, which it is not fully prepared to carry out, notices that the implementation of anti-racism laws is fragmented due to jurisdictional pluralism and the three regions having different laws that fall short of, or add to, the federal legislation. The three regions – the Flemish region, Walloon region, and Brussels Capital region (as well as the provinces within the Flemish and Walloon regions) – have passed a multitude of different decrees and ordinances pertaining to anti-racism and anti-discrimination in the past 14 years (DLA Piper, 2008). These various laws have dealt with racism in almost all fields across the state, and, as shown on the Centre's website, most of these are for "certain forms of discrimination". As a result, there are differences in the regional policies regarding the anti-racism project and some may fare better than others, depending on the specific racist practice being identified. This proliferation in laws does not aid the political anti-racism project as there is no uniform national plan of action (CERD, 2014), which is the only way to truly combat all areas of racist practice. Not having a national action plan is a violation of the Durban Plan of Action (CERD, 2014). The various laws of the regions only tackle limited elements. Therefore, not only is it unclear which body is responsible for implementation of laws and the monitoring of racist acts in the three regions, the national body lacks competency, and the regional laws are inconsistent and incomplete. Meanwhile, the supranational conventions and regimes pertaining to anti-discrimination and anti-racism (such as the Paris Principles and Durban Plan) have not being met (MSR, 2014).

The legislative weaknesses of the state in combatting racism are accompanied by an apparent unwillingness to discuss race and ethnicity. In order to effectively create a national anti-racism plan, having a sense of the ethnic and racial makeup of the country, as well as the spread of this across gender, age, and religion, would be necessary. However, a report by the Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination (CERD) on Belgium (2014) confirms that the state was not collecting data on the ethnic makeup of its prison population. Meanwhile, a separate report by the European Commission against Racism and Intolerance (ECRI, 2014) "reiterates" a recommendation to the state to consider "collecting data broken down according to categories such as citizenship, ethnic origin, language and religion".

Moreover, the Belgian census of 2001 "does not include questions on language, religion, ethnic or class origins" (Phalet and Swyngedouw, 2003). Analysis of the 2011 census results confirms that this practice has not changed, despite the proliferation in anti-racism laws. The reiterated recommendation to collect data, from two international conventions, and the omitting of demographic data in two censuses, a decade apart, raises questions about the effectiveness of the laws that have been passed by the regional bodies. The political anti-racism project in Belgium is one that lacks a coherent national plan, one based on misinformation and facilitated by a sub-par institution. However, there is some measure of data being collected by bodies such as CERD, ECRI and the European Network against Racism (ENAR), which is itself based in Brussels. Should the regional laws be based on the data collected by these bodies, it does not counter the fact that Belgian legislatures have developed a mute approach to race and ethnicity. The mute nature of the state on race and ethnicity, by not collecting varied demographics, reflects that of academia and of the RMCA, and can be considered a denial of the existence of racism. It seems Belgium deals with its colonial debt and contemporary racial trajectories by "forgetting" it or pretending it is non-existent.

Impact of the legislative weakness of Belgium

The legislative weaknesses of Belgium have led to the sustaining of institutional racism across the country, against multiple minority groups. It may be argued that the legislative weakness in facilitating an anti-racism project directly caused more racism in Belgium. Reflecting Vlaams Blok-like cultural racism notions, Belgian senators, in 2011, prohibited women from wearing face-covering items of clothing (Zemni, 2011). This means Muslim head scarves, such as the Niqab and the Burka are banned from being worn in public. CERD points out that religious discrimination in Belgium is "closely linked to ethnic or national origin discrimination". Hence, the 'Burqa ban' by Belgium's government is not something that occurred in a non-discriminatory, security orientated vacuum (like the delegation to CERD argued). Though being a ban on headscarves, it is one aimed at the visible cultural difference between Muslim communities and indigenous Belgian cultural identity. The 2014 report by CERD noted structural discrimination as a problem in Belgium, because of employers being allowed to prohibit headscarves. Meanwhile, an ENAR report in 2011 showed that 44% of employers felt headscarves

influenced their decision to hire someone (ENAR Shadow Report, 2014). Rather than facilitating anti-racism, Belgium's legislatures have passed regulation which justifies structural discrimination against Muslim women at the point of employment. Should the victim take legal action, Belgian courts have often ruled in favour of the employer – as evidenced by the 2013 Legal Memorandum.

Muslims have not been the only minority group to have suffered institutional discrimination due to the weakness of Belgium's legislative body in recent years. A European Commission (EC) report (2012) confirms that the majority of the approximately 30,000 Roma living in Belgium "live in poverty and suffer from social exclusion" (pg.10). The report also notes that due to a lack of "relevant statistics" it has been difficult to substantiate the claim, except through independent field studies. An empirical measurement of the welfare of Belgium's Roma population is impossible due to the state's unwillingness to collect data. Belgium's continuous violations of conventions that it is party to, regarding anti-racism and equality, is evidenced once more in the ECRI report, which notes that the state violates " the European Social Charter as it does not treat caravan dwellers correctly" (2014, pg. 34). The jurisdictional pluralism in the state also adversely affects the Roma population as the German-speaking part of the country does not have an integration policy for Roma, nor is there a national policy on housing for Roma (CERD, 2014). In addition to this, Belgium violates conventions on the status of stateless people, as there is no national framework to protect them (Chiurulli, 2014). This is significant because, in Belgium, the Roma population has a "precarious immigration status" (EC, 2012, pg.11) and due to the lack of data provision, stateless people and Roma are often treated as one and the same – equally lacking access to citizen's rights, such as housing and healthcare and education and facing employment obstacles as a result.

The discrimination that Muslims, Roma and stateless people face at the hands of the Belgian legislative system extends to an unwillingness to correct anti-migrant discrimination. Following the trend, Belgium is not in line with international convention regarding migrant populations, with CERD highlighting the European Court of Human Rights' (ECHR) concerns about the detainment of asylum seekers, and the ineligibility of non-nationals from outside Europe for public sector jobs (2014). Where demographic

data does exist, it homogenises all non-Belgians as "foreigners", such as when the 2011 census reports that the members of the population of foreign origin are less likely to obtain an undergraduate degree by 1.7 to 2.4 times. Research conducted by Van der Bracht et al (2015) also shows that discrimination against those who are not considered "ethnic Belgians" occurs "quite frequently" in the housing market, with 1 in 5 ethnic minorities discriminated against (pg. 170). That it happen so frequently, as recently as 2015, reflects the lack of a national anti-racism plan, which should naturally limit such discriminatory practices.

Wider impact of the anti-racism project and regional comparison

At the political and academic level, Belgium has distorted the history of its colonial legacy and has failed to prevent the continuation of the notions of cultural racism that dominated its history and the 1990s. The colonial debt that Belgium owes to the Congo as well as its debt to the migrant population, which helped it recover in the 20th century, seem to be largely forgotten, considering the modern political attitudes to racism and migrant groups. The lack of a national anti-racism plan, coupled with the proliferation of policies which are inconsistent, has contributed to the fostering of racial attitudes towards certain out-groups, with the victims being Muslims, Roma, and migrants. This inaction is a statement of persevering racial attitudes, and an exploration of this weakness of the state at the academic and institutional levels provides an analysis of a Western European state that fits into the literature on global racism in the contemporary, whilst not conforming in the historical. CERD reports across Western Europe certainly show some contemporary similarities: many still do not have national action plans in line with the Durban Plan of Action; data provision issues occur across the region, though, in some cases it is only regarding racist violence against black people (Ireland), religious demographics (Great Britain), or ethnic makeup (France and Germany), with almost all of them not collecting adequate data on racist violence (Goodey, 2007); Great Britain and the Netherlands do not fully adhere to conventions that are in place to protect migrants; counterterrorism policies in Great Britain and Germany have had a systematically negative effect on the Muslim populace; France and the Netherlands also have laws in place regarding the burka, but the majority of Britons and Germans say they would like the same measures to be in place in their countries (Atlantic Council, 2010); across the entire region,

Roma are still institutionally discriminated against by the state and do not have the citizen's rights they deserve. This general trend across Western Europe is clarified in a 2014 press release by ENAR:

For Black people, Roma, Muslims, migrants from non-EU countries, and women with a minority or migrant background living in Europe, discrimination is a major obstacle when looking for a job. Even once in employment, things don't get better.

In this case, the depth of research allowed for Belgium is not possible for the rest of Western Europe. What can be broadly discerned is that the contemporary trajectory of racism within Belgium is one that is aligned to that of its neighbours. Whilst a concise analysis of Belgium shows that the anti-racism project is one that does not take into account its colonial legacy, the same cannot be confidently concluded for the rest of the region without analysing the individual histories, which is beyond the scope of this essay. However, giving that most have colonial legacies of sorts, and racism has been largely instrumental in their modernities, it can be assumed that there is no conscious, concentrated political effort by them to address their histories. At the very least, they do not attempt atone for it through effective anti-racism policies.

Conclusion

Though the way racism interacted with Belgium's modernity is different to the rest of Western Europe, the key thing is that it did modernise as a result of racism. Moreover, the post-Second World War period left Belgium at the same *ground zero* as the rest of Western Europe. In economic terms, they were all the same and, arguably, the differences in their histories no longer mattered for them. In this way, it may be argued that they began to homogenise at this point, to an extent, in that they all faced the same issues of needing immigrants only to consider these immigrants a burden. Moreover, though the timelines and locations are different, they all still racially identified a group of people and *othered* that

group in order to facilitate economic modernisation. The different timelines evidences the polycentrism of the region, as the racialization practice of one country influenced that of another, centuries later.

By the end of the 20th century, these states each had some sense of a physical *other* (mainly *Muslim-looking* communities) and anti-immigration, which added upon Europe's dark legacy of anti-Roma. The shared experiences of the 20th century and the new interconnectedness and security issues they faced, through the EU, globalisation, and NATO, meant they equally grew in Islamophobia sentiments. With none of these states fully addressing their colonial and immigrant legacies yet growing in racist attitudes in similar ways, they seem almost homogenised now that their paths have aligned.

Critically, the way in which a scholar interacts with this revelation that these states are somewhat homogenised in their contemporary racial practices and *how* they practiced racism, as well as the way it interacts with their modernity, will lead to a conclusion of the existence of polyracism or monoracism. A scholar that sees this homogenisation as evidence of historical homogenisation will argue on the part of monoracism. In this way, considerations that their shared history only began to take shape in the 1940s are disregarded. Furthermore, it disregards the fact that these states are not culturally similar, in that there are very important differences in their contemporary policies that may put two of these states on opposite ends of a spectrum depending on the specific aspect of racism being discussed. Due to colonial legacies, the *Muslim-looking other* might be North African (as the case is in France) or South Asian (as is the case in Great Britain). Monoracism would argue that Western Europe is culturally racist to Muslims, without exploring the variations that exist within that statement. The incorrect understanding of contemporary homogenisation leads to an incorrect assumption of a homogenised history.

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