

Finding Honor in Prejudice: The Challenges of Being Discriminated In Academia

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Few issues have the power to provoke such powerful and divergent views as those involving race and discrimination. The diversity in any society manifests differences based on factors such as ethnicity, country of origin, color, gender, belief system, class and power. The role of recruitment agencies and human resources departments has long been concerned with racial and ethnic inequality within work organizations. This traditional strength of recruitment agencies seem to be languishing in academia where one can find violations and prejudicial conduct. It is undoubted that this sort of abuse is a major challenge that is deteriorating the quality of education of millions of people. Private universities which are at the mercy of their masters' voice expound to others the morality of human rights, but will not admit that they continue silently to assent to the continued restricting of opportunities for life, liberty and the pursuit of truth. This paper hopes to increase the level of awareness and understanding of everyday prejudicial attitudes or behaviors. Moreover, this preliminary study develops assessment tools that can be used to identify the extent and nature of systemic racism within the culture of educational institutions in the Middle East.

Field of Research: Human Resource Management, Sociology and Economy

1. Introduction

It is often said that in law a man is guilty when he violates the rights of another. In ethics, he is guilty if he only thinks of doing so. Racism is a subject that is far too complex and the greatest gene in a prejudiced victim is the fear of expression. Prejudice and intolerance are problems that confront every country in the world. Countries particularly experiencing unprecedented growth and development in investment opportunities necessitate the need for skilled, unskilled and professional labor. Prejudice is precisely the loss of colorblindness. The quantifying of implicit bias is proof that one is not colorblind despite one's best intentions. If colorblindness is a virtue, prejudice is a vice, and efforts to eliminate stereotypes should be intensified and justified. There are vast racial disparities in the United States with regard to academic achievements and socioeconomic status, but intense disagreement prevails about the extent to which these disparities arise from discrimination. Who is responsible for the disparities?

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The Middle East will have to face this question sooner rather than later. The need for greater non-racial understanding is vitally important. The ultimate goal of the civil rights movement is not to eliminate socioeconomic disparities but to create a society where one is not judged by the color of one's skin but by the content of one's character. Recognizing rich diversity seeks not only to improve education, but to improve relations by reducing prejudice and reducing general societal stereotypes.

It is somewhat surprising that little research addresses the degree to which a professor's race influences his or her application for a vacancy. Moreover, to what extent student evaluations manifest a racial bias. When race or discrimination is discussed, it is treated as a minor factor in a routine. Zuberi (2001) suggests that before any society or institution can liberate itself from the grip of racism, the society has to acknowledge that racism exists, and that it is not something which has been blown out of proportion; neither is it the figment of some people's imagination. Knowledge of the impact of racism is limited by the following considerations: the tendency among people to deny, minimize, and rationalize the existence of racism; the tendency to ascribe inferior status to Blacks; the application of many stereotypes and myths to Blacks that serve to have them viewed as nonresponsive to human influences; and finally, a Black tradition which teaches one to deflect racial provocation and to master and contain pain. It is not surprising that, given this disregard to racial discrimination, a situation of "honor" could develop.

Throughout history and in many parts of the world, racial and ethnic differences have led to inequality, discrimination, antagonism and in some cases violent conduct. Challenged by an increasingly complex body of federal and state laws designed to eliminate discriminatory practices such as racism and conscious reliance on stereotypes, the United States academia and South Africa in particular during the apartheid regime enacted conscience clauses to combat discrimination in employment practices. Together with antidiscrimination laws, and equal opportunities clause, incidents of blatantly discriminatory exclusion consequently decreased significantly in the United States and in South Africa. These enactments prohibited employment discrimination on the basis of race, color, religion, sex, or national origin. Academics who lived through the Apartheid regime particularly in South Africa and in the United States have seen the hurtful ways in which discrimination operates in the workplace. In some countries, traditional social norms permitting overt racism and segregation may be recurring and at times as a blanket policy or in discrete identifiable decisions. As a result, it cannot be denied that discrimination practices are creeping into one's impressions of worth and one's assignment of merit on the job, and behind even the most honest belief in equality, perpetuating the very injustices that civil society and universities in particular decry. Dominant white individuals and groups systematically and deliberately exclude black and particularly black women from certain jobs. The impact of this subtle operation of bias has not gone unnoticed in scholarship. A number of scholars have documented the ways in which unconscious motivations and bias can lead to discrimination in

employment, promotion, merit increases and other contexts. In his landmark article *The Id, the Ego, and Equal Protection: Reckoning with Unconscious Racism*, Lawrence (1987) argues that much discrimination today results from subconscious instincts and motivations rather than from conscious, deliberate decisions to exclude or to harm. Drawing from psychoanalytic and cognitive theory, Lawrence's insights, although not set specifically within the employment context, do shed much-needed light on the relationship between unconscious beliefs and racially discriminatory practices.

Any reference to race, creed, color or nationality in any element of a system or sub-system has the capacity to instill racism into systemic practice. Such references support, transmit and manifest racism within the system. Unless constant vigilance is maintained, elements of a system may also spread unnoticed racism into its practice. (Commission on Systemic Racism in the Ontario Criminal Justice System, 1995).

2. Racism and its manifestation

The language of racism has become more sophisticated. Many organizations have joined in the chorus in the elimination of racism, however, there is still no instrumental background. Semantics can disguise the tenor of racist remarks. A simple definition of racism can be easily offered by most people. The Oxford Dictionary offers the simplest definition of racism as "prejudice based on race", and this is how most people understand the concept. The primary problem with this definition of racism is that it contains an assumption that is invalid, that there is a scientifically determined category of race. Once one starts to analyze this definition, it becomes apparent that racism requires a far more complex definition. Although humankind have been socialized to believe that people can be differentiated on the basis of race, that there are certain biologically determined differences between peoples, humanity cannot be divided into groups distinguishable by biological properties (Satzewich, 1998). Such a distinction is arbitrary, unscientific and works to perpetuate divisive assumptions about people. Yet, the concept of racism remains very real in that human societies continue to function as though races do exist. Thus, race as a social concept continues to be a root cause of human inequality.

Racism takes many forms, although it is usually understood in the individual sense. Essentially there are three main forms, individual racism, systemic racism and cultural racism (Henry, et.al. 1995). Individual racism manifests itself in individual's attitudes and behaviors, and is the easiest type to identify. Systemic racism consists of the policies and practices of organizations, which directly or indirectly operate to sustain the advantages of peoples of certain "social races". This type of racism is more difficult to address because it is implicit in the policies of organizations and often unconscious. Abella (1984) suggests that systemic discrimination a consequence of systemic racism refers to practices or attitudes that have, whether by design or impact, the effect of limiting an individual's or a

group's right to the opportunities generally available because of attributed rather than actual characteristics. It is not a question of whether this discrimination is motivated by an intentional desire to obstruct someone's potential, or whether it is the accidental byproduct of innocently motivated practices or systems. If the barrier is affecting some groups in a disproportionately negative way, it is a signal that the practices that lead to this adverse impact may be discriminatory. Cultural racism is the basis of both other forms of racism, as it is the value system which is embedded in society which supports and allows discriminatory actions based on perceptions of racial difference, cultural superiority and inferiority. Racism is not only an attitude, but it is the specific actions that result from this attitude which impact upon, marginalize and oppress some people. In acknowledging and defining racism it is important to recognize that racism affects people not only on a theoretical level, but in the wider structures of society, most notably in the systems of education, justice, media, policing, immigration, and, employment, as well as in hate activity and government policies. Being a party to the International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination, could help resolve to adopt all necessary measures for speedily eliminating racial discrimination in all its forms and manifestations particularly in countries where systemic racism exists.

The historical roots of racism can be found in campaigns against the slave trade and colonialism. In more recent times, it was inspired by the civil rights movement in the US and by the various resistance movements to apartheid in South Africa, where racism took a particularly explicit and institutionalized form. Apartheid has since been abolished and during the last thirty years many states have enacted legislation against racial discrimination. Yet racism has not disappeared, nor is it in the process of doing so. On the contrary, blatant and covert discrimination on grounds of race remains entrenched in almost all societies. As recent increases in racial violence by extremists in Europe show, old and explicit forms of racism are still alive. Nevertheless, those who face discrimination increasingly confront forms of racism that are covert or more complex or are linked to wider issues, such as changes in the nature of the state, gender discrimination, or marginalization due to developments in the global economy. These complex issues are more difficult to address, precisely because they are intricate and because the specific role racism plays is less apparent and can, consequently, be more easily denied. Those who suffer entrenched discrimination or complex forms of discrimination also respond in complicated ways. Discrimination may be systemic rather than personal, and is therefore less easily identified and understood. Where discrimination is deeply entrenched and internalized, some victims deny they are oppressed or at some level accept their condition; others oppress those who are lower than they are in the social scale; or oppress those who have oppressed them.

These wider issues need to be understood by governments and intergovernmental organizations and particularly universities that have a major responsibility to end racial discrimination. After fifty years of action against racism

under the United Nations system, it is clear that anti-discrimination legislation by itself will not eliminate racism or racial discrimination. Deeply entrenched social attitudes appear to drive the reproduction of racial prejudice, and successful policies will need to address these. In addition, powerful new forces associated with global economic change are creating conditions for the emergence of new forms of discrimination. These issues need to be analysed and brought into the debate. In recent years, no doubt for various reasons, public and institutional interest in racism has seemed to weaken. Though there is institutional activity, in industrial societies there is less sense of urgency or public outrage. No doubt the abolition of apartheid was itself a factor in this. At the same time, however, governments have adopted much stricter policies to curb migration and mobility in labor. These policies, which particularly target immigrants from the poorer regions, are themselves open to the charge that they are racist. In addition, governments and inter-governmental institutions have become deeply engaged in "new wars", particularly in Eastern Europe and sub-Saharan Africa, which have spawned a vocabulary of "ethnic cleansing", "tribalism" and "ethnic conflict". While seeming to be more specific, this vocabulary has often obscured the racial or racist dimensions of such conflicts and thereby confused the discussion of racial discrimination in general. The Washington, DC, Fair Employment Practices Commission found blacks face discrimination in one out of every five job interviews. Today employers use different phases of the hiring process to discriminate against minorities (recruiting from primarily white schools instead of through job training programs; requesting a recent photograph together with application) and offer higher status jobs and pay to white employees. Reports of job discrimination against African Americans are correlated with darker complexion, higher education, immigrant status, and young age. Discrimination exacts a financial cost in the form of lower salary, and it strongly hinders upward mobility of employees who are victims of discrimination. Recent multivariate research on U.S. Census Bureau data, controlling for education and other wage-related factors, shows that the white-black wage gap ("the cost of being black") has continued to be more than 10 percent, about the same as in the 1970s. In addition, the effect of discrimination over the life course suggests a cumulative impact on wages such that the earning gap between young blacks and whites becomes greater as this age cohort gets older. Market economy explanations about job discrimination do not adequately account for the prevalence of the phenomenon.

3. Ethnic division of labor

Any Black scholar who has applied for a vacancy or has taught at an institution of higher learning probably can tell numerous stories about discriminatory practices. Few however, talk about it other than anecdotally. Research has shown how Black scholars experiences differ from those of their white counterparts, particularly with regard to role conflict, isolation, and a lack of respect and legitimacy as scholars. When it comes to explaining economic incorporation patterns of immigrants and questions of why workers from certain countries are

funneled into particular industrial/occupational opportunities are crucial. Some of the prejudice and stereotyping that dark-skinned foreigners face in the world is a result of the ancient tradition of dividing populations into discrete groupings based on religion, ethnicity, and even occupation. Typically each city was divided into “quarters” or neighborhoods based on religious and ethnic characteristics. Visible symbols of division have not been eliminated by the globalization process. Ethnic and occupational divisions still continue. Culture tends to engender particularistic loyalties, immobile and resistant to change. There has been very little scholarship on the subject of racism in the Arab world where political leaders would deny the prevalence of racism. Perhaps there is a lack of a strong academic constituency to promote the subject and excessive academic specialization that inhibits inter-disciplinary studies. Many would argue that race in the Arab region is a matter of “social snobbery” rather than of discrimination. What essentially happens when a person breaks of that funneled occupation? One needs to become interested in such questions and seek to answer them by researching the collective mobility of racial, ethnic, and immigrant groups. The advocacy of ‘ethnicity’ means racism plus tradition, that is, racism plus conformity. There is no surer way to infect mankind with hatred, blind, virulent hatred, than by splitting it into ethnic groups or tribes. Individualism is the only alternative to the racism of political correctness. One must recognize that everyone is a sovereign entity, with the power of choice and independent judgment.

4. Perceptions of Race in the Arab World

Perry (2003) in an authoritative article on this subject makes it abundantly clear that color prejudice is at the heart of many issues in the Middle East. As in the slave society of America, the recruitment of foreign workers with darker skin color is a practical advantage for employers in the Arab World because it allows the easy identification and control of the work force. Consequently in every day life the Middle Eastern Culture establishes a more or less indelible identification between relatively dark skin color and a state of disempowerment, especially for foreign workers. In recent years journalists have regularly produced articles drawing attention to the living conditions of foreign workers and their being subject to racial abuse. Many Arabs particularly Lebanese have spent decades in Africa pursuing businesses throughout the continent, and have followed the colonial mentality established by the British, French and Belgian powers. As foreign entrepreneurs they have become included in the colonial class structure, ranking lower than the Europeans yet superior to the native Africans. Arab middle class entrepreneurs in Africa have a mixed reputation. While many have ignored the European example and established close personal ties with Africans leading to friendships, business partnerships, adoption into tribes and intermarriage, many others have followed the racist patterns set by European colonial culture. An American dean (of Lebanese origin) of a school of business told a candidate who resembles a person of Indian origin: “I wonder how students in the Middle East would take to you, because Indians come to Middle East as slaves”. This

confirms the findings of Perry (2003), who suggests that several students of the Lebanese diaspora present evidence that in constructing the Arab self as white Lebanese tended to follow the prevailing racial norms. While slavery in the Americas endured for some four centuries, in the Arab world it has been practiced for at least 1,300 years, and still goes on in some places even in tertiary educational institutions. Throughout that period Africans, were assigned the lowest status. It can be reasonably asserted, therefore, that such a long history of enslavement and negative treatment of Africans, no matter how relatively benign compared to Western slavery, would leave little or no trace of racist attitudes among Arabs. Scholars and leaders of thought in the Arab world have begun to address this subject with vigor. The field is wide open to many scholarly studies. Research needs to be conducted on present-day attitudes toward skin color in Arab society; the issue of skin-color in Arab film and television; the application of human rights guarantees to foreign workers; the prevalence or absence of intermarriage. Ethnographies of coherent African and African-Arab communities in the Arab world and in Africa are essential. The ongoing practice of slavery, in all its forms, needs to be brought to light by Arab scholars. Comparative studies must be conducted relating the Catholic Church and Islam in their respective practices of slavery. The Middle East is one of the most culturally diverse regions of the world. It stands at a global crossroads between Europe, Asia and Africa. Its population is composed of representative of many ethnic groups. Clearly the interaction of peoples and the exchange of vast resources in these three regions are the key to prosperity here as elsewhere, but are of such magnitude as to be unmatched anywhere else in the world. If diversity is a characteristic of a successful economy, then it is possible to argue that the Middle East will become the world's most prosperous region.

5. Universities combating racism

If one considers universities as one of the surviving institutions in combating discriminatory practices, and removing the prejudices and erroneous beliefs, such as the belief in the superiority of one race over another, which incites such practices, then the case of a black MIT professor who went on a hunger strike claiming that racism led to the university's decision to deny him tenure and the response of the university: that it was fully committed to addressing the effect of race in the hiring and advancement of minority faculty, and that it will continue to work toward resolution of the differences with the professor suggest that the situation in universities particularly with regards to recruitment is Panglossian.

In their seminal work, Chesler et.al. (2005) provides new and compelling evidence of institutional racism within higher education, as well as a valuable overview and detailed recommendations for systemic evaluation and transformation. It provides conceptual frames for understanding the historic and current state of intergroup relations and institutionalized racial (and other forms of) discrimination in the U.S. society and in colleges and universities. They argue

that subtle and overt forms of privilege and discrimination on the basis of race, gender, socioeconomic class, sexual orientation, religion and physical ability are present on almost all campuses, and this seriously damages the potential for all students to learn well and for all faculty and administrators to teach and lead well. The authors present the experiences of college students, faculty and administrators, and linking this material to research literature via interpretive analyses of people's experiences.

6. Conclusion

The greatest benefit of reducing prejudice and remedying stigmas may not be substantive but rhetorical. The study provides conceptual frames for understanding the historic and current state of intergroup relations and institutionalized racial (and other forms of) discrimination in the Middle East society, colleges and universities. This study does not claim to be a final or complete statement on racism. It is a brief survey of some of the main issues that currently preoccupy people who suffer from racial discrimination or who study its effects. A word should be said about definitions. It is extremely difficult to define racism and racial discrimination in a relevant and precise way. There is not full agreement about how to do so. It is also difficult to name accurately in a general way the groups of people who suffer racial discrimination. The definition in the International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination could be a point of reference. Not all discrimination is necessarily racist. The aim was to identify a range of issues for debate, and since there is no agreement on where racial discrimination begins and ends, further discussion should determine their status. For similar reasons, this document does not take adequate account of history. Numerous issues of substance arise here too, and many of them affect how one explains and understands the modern phenomenon of racism. Did the Atlantic slave trade and European colonialism create modern racism, or has it evolved from the many forms of slavery and bondage that have existed in human societies? Should racism be distinguished, as an ideology, from more ancient and universal forms of xenophobia? Such complex historical questions cannot unfortunately be addressed in so short a paper. Finally, this study does not describe what it is to experience racism and racial discrimination. Perhaps only literature can do this adequately. In one form or another it is to be found in almost every society on earth. It is deeply associated with certain forms of entrenched poverty and certain kinds of violence. A feature of racism is that, though widespread, for many people it remains unseen. When it is not physically violent, those who do not experience it often fail to understand how profoundly offensive it is. If this paper helps in any way to sharpen one's awareness of the numerous and also subtle forms that racism and racial discrimination take in societies, it will have served its purpose.

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