



The Resurgence of Race in Contemporary Europe

Marius Turda

Oxford Brookes University

In contrast to the seminal scholarly works on nationalism of the early 1990s, a programme of engagement with the study of 'race' in Europe has only recently emerged, one that seeks to employ regional and trans-national methodologies. It is no longer enough to abandon Cold War historiography, to study what was previously banned or inaccessible, to reconstruct narratives of national and nation-state identities in their mutual exclusivity. The history of 'race' in contemporary Europe must re-position and re-invent itself within a wider global context field which is itself undergoing a profound process of change, as academic attention shifts to current public affairs, especially at a time when the rise of Islamism and Jihadism place issues of ethnic and racial identity back on the agenda of national politics. The fields of European and global studies have grown more inclusive from West to East, prompting the need for suitable frameworks for comparative cross-continental studies.

By analysing the racialisation of national belonging and consciousness that had been developing in Europe since the 1990s, and how this process adapted to various other global contexts, my research aims to contribute fundamentally to an understanding of race that takes the radical multiplicity of national contexts as well as the complex processes of ideological transmission and reception into account. Substantial comparative research and analytical effort is necessary to address the growing political significance of these topics from a comparative international perspective.

Whilst grounded in archival research, my findings are designed to reach out to academia, governmental and non-governmental agencies, and the general public alike, and aspires to create the new foundations upon which a solid and refreshing approach to unsettling and tragic episodes in the recent history of Europe (such as Spain 2004; UK 2005; Norway 2011; Belgium 2014; France 2015) can be built. The aim is to create a coherent methodological framework suitable for dealing with questions of collective, minority and individual identity, as well as the institutionalisation of racial discourses in a variety of cultural, religious and political contexts. Essentially, I intend to investigate comprehensively the extent to which the current resurgence of 'race' in contemporary Europe marks a watershed in the relations between various ethnic communities. I also intend to analyse the impact which nation, 'race' and religion had on their particular internal discourses on identity, alongside its changing definitional framework caught between competing cultural traditions, religious sectarianism and biological visions of belonging.

Substantial comparative research, analytical effort and trans-disciplinarity is necessary to address the reality of 'race' whereby individual and collective identities are becoming essentialised and reified again due to increasing political polarity, religious antagonism and xenophobic behaviour. The following general questions serve both as research guidelines and foundations on which my methodological approach is built:

- How and why did 'race' become such an obsession within European countries and why, in the twenty-first century, does 'race' continue to inflame hearts and minds to such a powerful degree?
- What impact does 'race' and heredity have upon different forms of inter-cultural identity and its refashioning in the current political climate?
- How have new forms of racism come to be instrumental in the breakdown of the 'multiculturalist' consensus of the 1990s and disguised in new formulations about how 'cultural', 'religious' and 'ethnic' differences make certain groups 'unassimilable'?
- How do culture, religion and 'race' challenge assimilation and the functioning of a plural society?
- How can different forms of difference (ethnic, religious, cultural, sexual) be used strategically by various agencies (both public and private) to exclude social actors (migrants, for instance, or women) for political and economic purposes?

I hope that my research will uncover the manifold ways in which nation, race and population have influenced how different countries in Europe have used these nexuses to solve societal challenges and change, in the past and especially in the present. To define and investigate the national contexts that are now struggling with the resurgence of 'race' will involve revisiting existing case studies, as well as pioneering the study of currently little understood racial movements in Europe (Greece for example). This expansion of the current geographic remit (from East-Central Europe to Southern, Western and Northern Europe) will serve both to open up valuable new research avenues towards a comprehensive history of European racism in the twentieth first century, as well as to raise important historical questions where these have been forgotten or repressed.