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What are the central contributions of critical thinkers to the study of international politics?

The case of Rachel Dolezal was brought to the attention of the public, mass media and popular culture in June 2015. Rachel Dolezal was white woman who identified herself as a black, and, until her parents identified her as white, presented herself as African-American. As a black woman, Rachel Dolezal justified her appearance by stating that she came from a mixed-race family, and rose to the top of the hierarchy of the National Association for the Advancement of Coloured People (NAACP) in the USA. While photographs reveal her to be Caucasian, black culture had influenced her personal life, as she had siblings who are black, her husband was black, and she had studied at Howard University for blacks. The case of Rachel Dolezal is highly complex, and has been discussed by many multicultural educators, focussing on the issue of her ability to identify herself as a black, including issues related to her biological identity. This case gave rise to many questions relating to the ability to change by race.

Keywords: International politics, black culture, Rachel Dolezal, identity, race, performativity, critical thinkers.

Introduction

When MSNBC news broadcast the case related to Rachel Dolezal, Melissa Harris-Perry (a professor, writer and political commentator who focuses on race and gender issues in African-American politics) used cautious language, similar to that employed when referring to transgender individuals, to discuss the legitimacy of Rachel Dolezal's identity [1]. She also careful to employ the word 'equivalent' when referring to transracial and transgender issues. However, she drew attention to language such as 'trans' (i.e. different) and 'cis' (i.e. the same), and raised the potential for an individual to be 'cis black'. This definition forms a different category of being black, focussing on achieving 'blackness' through experiences and opportunities as well as through consciousness and feeling, even when an individual's biological parents are not black [2]. This identifies many potential areas of discussion concerning race performativity. The comparison between Jenner and Dolezal employed 'trans' to identify individuals whose identity do fails to match their sex or race assigned at birth. Melissa Harris-Perry may thus have attempted to establish that black identity can work along the same lines as trans identity, and therefore should be accepted, i.e. claiming that the racial identity of some individuals fails to match their race as assigned at birth. This analogy states that a cis-black individual is both born black and identifies black, whereas a trans-black person is not black, but identifies him or herself as black (ibid.). It is beyond the scope of this current paper to discuss in further detail this analogy related to trans, beyond its implications for multicultural educationalists.

Methodology

This article discusses the phenomenon of race performativity, taking the well-known case of Rachel Dolezal as a case study (Rachel Dolezal is a white woman, who identified as black). The discussion focuses on the needs and desires that lie behind the performativity of the phenomenon of race as a new cultural and social practice, including why some individuals pretend to be 'others' [3]. Two authors have been selected to address the question of performativity of race, focussing on the central contributions of these critical thinkers in international politics in terms of race performativity related to the case of Rachel Dolezal. Firstly, Butler's [4] *Gender Trouble* focuses on identity and gender performativity, and its engagement with tranracialism. Secondly, Fanon's [5] *Black Skin and White Masks* analyses race performativity with regard to Rachel Dolezal from the perspective of social construction and racism. A study of the works of other significant authors in this field is beyond the scope of this study, however the discussion does include secondary literature. This article establishes why race performativity has attracted a high degree of attention from scientists and critical thinkers, focussing on the Rachel Dolezal case of race performativity, and inspired by critical thinkers of issues relating to race. Firstly, there is a discussion of the background of the story of race performativ-

ity in the case of Rachel Dolezal; secondly, there is a discussion of the views of Butler and Fanon concerning this issue, combining their interpretations with the example of race performativity in case of Rachel Dolezal; and fourthly, the paper analyses the central arguments of these two authors. Finally, the conclusion focusses on potential key contributions of critical thinkers in terms of race performativity in the case of Rachel Dolezal. The following section discusses Butler's analysis and her interpretation of performativity.

Discussion

The issue of race remains a subject of debate by performance theorists and biologists, with the discourse concerning transracial aspects focusing on the performativity of race. According to scholars and interpreters of Butler's work such as Bey and Sakellarides [6; 39] «race not only is but is done», i.e. race is not simply a commonly known identity, but a performative identity with different behavioural practices. This transracial case could have considerable significance if related to the gender performativity of Butler's *Gender Trouble*. Butler employed the race performativity of Rachel Dolezal as an analogy to increase understanding of the issue of gender performativity. Butler stated «gender proves to be performative — that is, constituting the identity it is purported to be... [4; 33]. There is no gender identity behind the expressions of gender; that identity is performatively constituted by the very 'expressions' that are said to be its results». Thus, if gender is divided into differences of sex, race is divided between black, white or brown, and race may be interpolated as a gender performativity, i.e. race is performative, constituting its own stated identity. Thus, in her interview with McGreal [7] Rachel Dolezal stated that, for her, how she feels is more important than how she was born. In addition, since the age of five, she had drawn self-portraits with a brown rather than peach coloured crayon, and with black curly hair [8].

One of interpreters of Butler's work, Stepan pointed to the analogy between issue of race and gender in the nineteenth century, stating that consideration of sexual and gender differences led to gender being considered considerably analogous to race. Thus, scientists or multicultural educationalists were able to explain sexual and gender differences by means of racial difference, as well as racial differences being used in relation to gender and sex issues, i.e. the marginalisation of woman and individuals from a multicultural background. However, Stepan argued that being multicultural does not mean being either transgender or a woman, but is a helpful metaphor in establishing an understanding of identity through sex and gender, i.e. the discussion surrounding gender identity could prove helpful for those with little understanding of transracial issues. In addition, Stepan noted the implications of using analogy and metaphor for such identities, considering that new knowledge could be created through an ability to construct similarities of gender and race. Thus, the analysis of transgender and transracial identities establishes them to be mutually unique, however the fact that an individual can be both transgender and transracial tends to be oversimplified or omitted.

It needs to be recognised that being transracial and transgender is not a form of competition, but a means for individuals to establish legitimacy for their existence. Following the Rachel Dolezal case, the media contained a number of discussions as to whether transracial identity could be accepted in the same manner as a transgender identity. On the one hand, Rachel Dolezal was recognized as having achieved a 'transracial victory', while, on the other, she created a backlash from black women and trans black feminists. Kat Balque, a black trans women, claimed Rachel Dolezal's case was one of fake transracial identity, and refused to accept the analogy between transracial and transgender, arguing that the word 'transracial' is misused and misunderstood, and it is more appropriate to relate this term to transracial adoption, i.e. in which children and parents belong to a different race. Balque further claimed that differences between gender and race are founded in biology, and that, race, unlike gender, is a biological factor passed from parent to child, citing Butler's theory of performativity, which states, if an individual suddenly claims to be white, he/she will not be believed, because colour is not changeable. The concept of transitioning race is only possible for individuals of a certain appearance. Rachel Dolezal used tanning products and permed her hair to ensure her appearance appeared black, and therefore acted in a dishonest manner over a number of decades, as, while gender can be changed, it is impossible to change an individual's race, i.e. Dolezal could remove her tan and perm, but it is impossible to wash away gender (ibid.).

Blaque viewed the case of Dolezal as one of performance, i.e. she created the costume of a black face. Dolezal retained the ability to change her identity, which is not possible for those who are truly black, and thus the concept of transitioning race is only possible for certain individuals. Race performativity can be misunderstood when white people perform as non-white (i.e. use make up, a specific style of clothes, and particular body and facial expressions on television, in film or in different cultural or social locations). Opposition to this kind of performance is outlined by race performativity as discussed in Butler's *Gender*

Trouble. In an interview concerning *Gender Trouble*, Butler explained the tight definition of performativity as follows.

The bad reading goes something like this: I can get up in the morning, look in my closet, and decide which gender I want to be today. I can take out a piece of clothing and change my gender: stylise it, and then that evening I can change it again and be something radically other, so that what you get is something like the commodification of gender, and the understanding of taking on a gender as a kind of consumerism [9; 83].

Butler thus emphasised that the formation of subjects and identities constitutes performativity, and gender is not a radical option or choice, i.e. it is not voluntary. She claimed that an incorrect understanding led to some individuals relating their situation to performativity as discussed in *Gender Trouble*, and she was thus attempting to change this perception. She viewed performativity as involving repetition, frequently with the repetition of painful norms and rules and being forced to resignify, arguing that this constitutes a trap, rather than freedom [9]. However, Rachel Dolezal asserted that the way she identified herself as black was not «cash in, cash out, change up, do at a convenience level or to freak people out or to make people happy» [7; 1]. Rachel claimed that, if asked her how she identified herself, she would reply 'black', as whiteness does not describe who she truly is, i.e. her identity (ibid.).

The following chapter analyses the case of Rachel Dolezal from the point of view of Fanon [5].

Fanon [5] focussed on the concept of race as a historical construct and a culturally constructed artefact, rather than a biological feature [5]. Fanon suggested that the genealogy of race reflects the process of decolonisation and the ways rich white colonists developed their relationships with colonised blacks [5].

One of interpreters of Fanon's work, Kane [10; 356] stated that: «each exists only through the other and the nature of their relationship constructs their ontological polarisation». Thus, wealth exists in relation to inequality and poverty, and whiteness is established through the cultural and social construction of blackness, with race becoming an achievement, interposed through cultural relationships. In *Black Skin and White Masks*, Fanon illustrated how culture functions as a tool, including the social construction of race as an aspect of hierarchic power relationships [5]. As a result, «through the culture, skin pigmentation became deeply imbued with hierarchical meaning» [10; 357]. In the colonial world, indigenous histories and culture were replaced by newly-constructed racial ideologies, thus excluding parts of the population from privilege [11]. In *Black Skin and White Masks*, Fanon explored how this ideology was accomplished, and how the hierarchical mechanism was embedded in institutions such as government.

Similarly, in her interview with McGreal [7], Rachel Dolezal stated that individuals consider race is coded in their DNA, because human beings differ and therefore race is divided into different colours, i.e. white, black and other. However, she claimed that this assumption is fiction and race is a human invention. She claimed that she believes race is not real, and is not a biological trait, but is a hierarchical system controlling power and privilege [7]. Fanon's statement that culture is constructed, as apparent from 'mixed-race identifications', supports this view, i.e. Brubaker noted that in the year 2000, US citizens were given the opportunity to choose multiple racial identities, rather than select a single race [12]. Davis [12] further argued that, despite its cultural appropriation, racial 'betweenness' could be enacted performatively. Furthermore, these enactments emphasise that the nature of race is constructed and therefore artificial.

In *Black Skin, White Masks*, Fanon investigated racism through culture and language. Fanon pointed out that racial boundaries are distinguished and polarised, but are not created by the colour of an individual's skin, but are rather the result of cultural and historical processes [10]. Fanon did not accept race as an essence, viewing biological determinism as ideology and the result of colonisation, and a premise for racial 'othering' [10]. However, when Rachel Dolezal stated that she experienced racism, it was received with scepticism, e.g. by Toure Roasts, network contributor to MSNBC, who claimed that, while racism binds black people together, this is not true of culture [13], and that Rachel Dolezal's behaviour offended black people as they were unable to change their colour, while (despite her statement that she felt uncomfortable among whites) Rachel Dolezal could stop being black. Racial history is not straightforward, and contains many contradictions, all of which contribute to the meaning of race, and hence the meaning of blackness. The following section discusses the arguments of the two authors concerning the case of Rachel Dolezal.

The central contribution of Butler and Fanon established that racial categories are constructed when beliefs concerning biological difference are used to exclude sections of the population from equal opportunities [11]. In her interview with Viki Bell [14], Butler stated that she maintained a distinction between gender and race, as she was less interested in multiculturalism, than in how someone (or something) could become the condition for the other, or how one aspect could remain unmarked due to a difference in background. Tu-

vel stated that it is not possible to view race and sex as equivalent, as in arguments encouraging aspects of transgender to be applied to transracialism [15]. The point of understanding and analysing the issue of racial identity is to assist individuals seeking to find the answer to their own racial identity, i.e. Melissa Harris-Perry stated that she wished to understand the potential experience of being trans-black. It is important to emphasise that transgender issues have attracted a considerable amount of attention, thus raising more awareness among the population of individuals who transgender as opposed to those who view themselves as transracial. Therefore, understanding the issues surrounding race and gender helps to raise awareness of potential lessons concerning racism from issues related to gender and sexism.

Moreover, race performativity is, to certain degree, related to cultural appropriation, in accord with the ongoing discussion of the inherent privilege still experienced by white people. Nadra Kareem described cultural appropriation as appropriating without permission an individual's intellectual possessions, traditional knowledge, as well as cultural features and expressions [16], including the harm experienced by specific groups or minorities when they become the object of appropriation. The case of Rachel Dolezal therefore raises a number of issues, including whether she is employing a compliment, or is undertaking a form of cultural appropriation [7].

Recent discussions of race have contended that identifying a social construct forms the start, rather than the end, of understanding the process. Fanon stated that «colour prejudice is nothing more than the understanding of hatred of one race for another» [5; 97].

Butler and Fanon both claimed that it is important to recognise that race and gender are socially and culturally constructed, and form an aspect of power relationships. However, it is also important to heed Fanon's warning concerning the construction of a suprastructurally society. He stated that society does not resemble a biochemical process, and it is impossible to avoid human influence, i.e. «man is what brings society into being» [17; 6].

Scholars of postcolonial and cultural studies, such as, Kerrigan and Mueller, Dirks and Houts Picca, stated that race performance from white to non-white is viewed as a negative phenomenon by postcolonial and multicultural educationalists. Hua viewed the capacity to change race and experiencing being the 'other' as reassuring individuals of the stability and normativity of being white [3]. However, Low undertook research concerning fictional race transitions, arguing that performance as a non-white does not only consist of a search for the power or specific characteristics of others, but also aims to fill the gap between white and non-white that appeared as a result of imperialism and colonialism.

According to Majeri, some people believe that when identifying as a certain ethnicity, and seeking to be accepted by culture, transraciality emerge, as in case of Rachel Dolezal. It is not difficult to imagine why they see it in a positive way, even though racial identity and cultural identity are dependent on geography and upbringing.

Conclusion

Butler and Fanon reveal the shared artefacts around which the social construct of race performativity is understood: race is a historical accomplishment and artefact, it is culturally preserved, and its constructs inform the ontological process of the formation of human identity. The issue of race performativity in the case of Rachel Dolezal is still not fully understood, and requires considerable additional research. Allyson Hobbs, author of «Chosen Exile» about racial passing stated in MSNBC that Rachel Dolezal cannot be easily understood, as her identity is multilayered and complex [19]. However, Hobbs also noted that it is possible to be trans black and cis black, and there is a greater need for understanding, stating: «there certainly is a chance that she identifies as a black woman and that there could be authenticity to that» [18; 427]. There remain a number of arguments concerning whether an adult should be given the opportunity to choose to which group or category they wish to belong. Human beings can decide and how to live with, and against, constructed norms, and which assists them in constructing and forming a personal identity. Human beings create themselves within existing vocabularies of which they have no choice, leading to a need to deny these vocabularies, or evolve new norms and constructions [6].

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Сыни ойшылдардың халықаралық саясатты зерттеуге қосқан негізгі үлесі қандай?

2015 жылдың маусым айында Рейчел Дозалдың ісі қоғамның, бұқаралық ақпарат құралдарының және бұқаралық мәдениеттің назарына ұсынылды. Рейчел Дозал белгілі еуропалық тектегі адам құқықтарының қорғаушысы, көптеген жылдар бойы өзін афроамерикандық деп таныстырып келді, бірақ шын мәнінде шыққан тегі афроамерикандық емес еді. Афроамерикандық ұлт өкілі ретінде Рейчел Дозал өзінің түр келбетін өзгертіп, аралас нәсілдер отбасынан шыққандығын және Америка Құрама Штаттарындағы түрлі-түсті халықтың прогреске жәрдемдесу ұлттық қауымдастығының (НААСР) бөлімшесін басқарды. Алайда, фотосуреттер оның еуропалық отбасынан шыққандығын аңғартады. Қара нәсілді халықтың мәдениеті оны айналып кете алған жоқ, себеп ретінде афроамерикандық тектен шыққан асырап алған інілері мен апа-сіңлілері және күйеуінің болуын айта аламыз. Сонымен қатар, ол Говард университетінде оқыды, ол сегрегацияны тоқтатқанға дейін (яғни, адамдардың қоғамда әлеуметтік мәртебелерінің айырым белгісі бойынша санаттарға бөлінуі) афроамерикандықтарға арналған университет болды. Рэйчел Дозалдың ісі өте күрделі және мәдениетаралық пен көпмәдениетті білім беру саласындағы белгілі ғалымдармен талқыланып, оның биологиялық ұқсастығына байланысты мәселелерді қоса алғанда, өзін афроамерикандық ретінде анықтау қабілетіне назар аударды. Осы жағдай адамның нәсіліне байланысты, өзгеру қабілетіне қатысты көптеген сұрақтар туғызды.

Кілт сөздер: халықаралық саясат, қара нәсілді халықтың мәдениеті, Рейчел Дозал, бірегейлік, нәсілдік тиесілігі, перформативтілік (орындау қабілеттілігі), сыни ойшылдар.

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Каков основной вклад критических мыслителей в изучение международной политики?

В июне 2015 года дело Рэйчел Дозал было доведено до сведения общественности, средств массовой информации и массовой культуры. Рэйчел Дозал — известная правозащитница европейского происхождения, не обладая никакими афроамериканскими корнями, много лет выдавала себя за афроамериканку. Рэйчел Дозал изменила свою внешность, заявив, что она родом из семьи сме-

шанной расы, и возглавила отделение Национальной ассоциации содействия прогрессу цветного населения (NAACP) в США. В то время фотографии свидетельствуют о ее происхождении из европейской семьи. Однако культура чернокожего населения повлияла на ее личную жизнь кардинально, благодаря приемным братьям, сестрам и мужу афроамериканского происхождения. Более того, она училась в Университете Ховард, который считался университетом для афроамериканцев до отмены сегрегации. Случай с Рэйчел Дозал очень сложен и обсуждался многими учеными в сфере межкультурного и поликультурного образования и сосредоточил внимание на проблеме ее способности идентифицировать себя как афроамериканку, включая вопросы, связанные с ее биологической идентичностью. Это дело породило много вопросов, касающихся способности меняться в зависимости от расы.

Ключевые слова: международная политика, культура чернокожего населения, Рэйчел Дозал, идентичность, расовая принадлежность, перформативность, критические мыслители.

Репозиторий КарГУ