Research of Social Group Prejudice after Germany's Defeat during the World War via the Investigation of Prejudice Against Domestic Communists and Jews

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Abstract

It is well known that the Holocaust act of racial cleansing of the Jewish nation by Nazism led by Hitler during World War II was based on racism. However, the social, personal, and historical reasons behind this behaviour are diverse. In addition to explaining some existing historical and personal reasons, this article will use scapegoat theory and social identity theory to specifically analyse racial discrimination. The social reasons behind it, and thus reflect on explaining the reasons behind some social prejudice phenomena and how to avoid social prejudice caused by such social reasons in today's society.

Keywords

Scapegoat theory; Social identity theory; Social group prejudice; Racialism.

1. Introduction

It is well known that nearly 6 million Jews died during World War II at the hands of Hitler and his Nazi party. There are a variety of reasons for such an inhuman and brutal tragedy, which is not only due to the influence of traditional European anti-Semitism, but also owing to Hitler's political need to oppose Marxism in order to consolidate the Nazi dictatorship and the economic need to plunder the Jewish property. However, this social contradiction was intensified after Germany's defeat in World War I, as Germans attributed the defeat to the communists who organized the workers' strike in Germany and the Jews who had economic advantages at that time, thereby resulting in more grievous prejudice and a sense of racial superiority.

With regard to the motivational sources of prejudice, there are two major concepts are emphasized, which are Frustration & aggression: scapegoat theory and Social identity theory: feeling superior to others. These two theories can be used to explain the causes of prejudice against Domestic Communists and Jews after The First World War and the methods available then for mitigating this phenomenon.

The scapegoat theory refers to frustration or aggression create hostility toward members of other groups of people, which ends up being expressed in prejudice (Nelson, 2006). For example, the reason for Germany's defeat could not be attributed to the military, but the government. For the German people, if the country had not collapsed due to the revolution, the German army would certainly have won in the first World War. Therefore, the communists who organized workers' strikes in the country and the economically dominant Jews were considered to have no consideration for the interests of the nation and the state, so that the war logistics supply was insufficient, and materials could not be adequately supplied in time, which led to the German defeat. The Nazi party also used the hatred of Versailles peace among the masses in Germany at that time to incite the revanchist sentiment and transfer this sentiment to the Jews.

In addition, social identity theory refers to that people classify themselves into a certain community and identify with their own group, thus generating in-group preference and out-group bias, which results in favoring their own group and discriminating against external groups (Islam, 2014). For instance, During World War II, the implementation of Hitler's racist policy further stimulated the polarization of ethnic identity among German citizens, who gradually regarded the Germanic nation as the inner group and Jews as the outer group. Under the banner of nationalism and socialism prevalent in Germany at that time, the Nazi Party advocated that the German nation was an excellent nation and regarded the Jewish nation as an inferior one. Due to the effect of in-group prejudice, the Germans would believe that Jews were evil and that they were a superior race to Jews, which may have contributed to the Holocaust.

Therefore, the following part will use these two theories to analyze the phenomenon of social group prejudice in World War I and World War II, so as to propose corresponding solutions, and finally draw the practical significance of these two theories in contemporary life.

2. Case Description

At the end of the 19th century, in Germany, the special meaning of Jews was injected into the general consciousness, because the existence of egoism made human nature gradually distanced from the caring social essence, and this egoism was inherent in the Jewish national character, and cultural nationalists opened up Jewish criticism. The literary works portray the evil image of Jews. They lack love, control mankind and restrain freedom, and are the enemies of mankind as a whole. They are selfish and the pursuit of money is their deep-rooted nature (Zhang, 2016). This kind of racial discrimination and prejudice has planted the seeds of hatred. Whenever the German nation experiences disasters, the Jewish nation has become the main object of condemnation by the German nation.

The outbreak of World War I accelerated the spread of anti-Semitism. In terms of scope and degree, radical anti-Semitism has made important breakthroughs in the recognition and acceptance of German society. In the two world wars, Germany brought anti-Semitism to its peak.

The outbreak of the First World War plunged the entire German society into frenzy, and the ardent nationalist sentiments of the Germans burst forth unreservedly in an instant. The successive victories of the German army at the beginning of the war gave the Germans ample reason to look forward to the final victory of the German army. However, they failed in the end, and people were shocked. The great psychological contrast made it difficult for many people to accept the fact that Germany was defeated. Without understanding the real battle conditions on the front lines, the German people believed that their army was not defeated on the battlefield but was affected by other factors behind it. The factor that led to Germany defeat was precisely because the Jews and Communists stabbed the German army in the back.

Take the police of relationship to anti-Semitism as an example. In addition, the most important of those who initiate violent attacks on Jews are Nazis, and Nazism is very popular among the police. For example, in Berlin, 445 out of 14,000 to 16,000 police officers are members of the Nazi party or believers in Nazism, accounting for 3% of the total number of police officers in Berlin (Su, 2014). As a guarantee for maintaining social fairness and justice, the police do have prejudices. In the police system, there are so many police officers supporting Nazism, so it is questionable how much responsibility they will do to protect Jews when it comes to anti-Semitic violence. On the night of September 12, 1931, this day was the first day of Rosh Hashanah. When the Jews celebrated Rosh Hashanah, the Nazis launched a violent attack against them in Berlin. Within an hour, the mobs beat up anything that looked like Jewish passersby and destroyed a cafe where Jews often gather. When the police arrived, the mob had

already run away. In the end, 63 perpetrators were arrested and 20 of them were put in prison. According to relevant information, a considerable number of police officers secretly provided help to the Nazis in this anti-Semitic incident (Donald, 2000). The police and government practice of watching developments without sanctions has contributed to local anti-Semitism.

3. Frustration & Aggression: Scapegoat Theory

3.1. Explain Certain Phenomenon in World War I

The phenomenon appeared in World War I mentioned above could be further explained using the theory of frustration-aggression. According to Breuer and Elson (2017), frustration-aggression theory mainly illustrated that frustration encountered may cause people to develop hostility towards members of other groups, and the hostility would eventually be expressed in the form of prejudice or discrimination. This theory is also known as the scapegoat theory. In other words, an object as a scapegoat would be needed to suffer from the hostility when people cannot accept their inability or cannot release the aggression to the real cause of their frustration.

In order to pay reparations resulted from the World War I, the Germany government had to increase the taxes rate which definitely became a burden upon the German people. As a result, the German people were plunged into extreme poverty and depression. According to the process of scapegoat theory, the German people at this time were suffering from the economy decline and they were more than eager to know what led to the economy depression. As a result, the Jews population who were wealthy as well as the Communists who organized workers' strike were treated as the reason, because the strike destroyed the economy development, and the rich Jews group were seen as the vested interest who still made profits under this circumstance. Therefore, the Jews and the Communists finally became the scapegoats. In fact, Germany's defeat in World War I was due to that the government invested in too many supplies for the army which led to the decline of the economy. However, since the government tried to escape its own responsibility and transferred it to others, the Nazis created the illusion that if the Jews and Communists were punished, deprived of their democratic rights and exterminated altogether, all the burden German people were suffering from would disappear.

Grossarth-Maticek et al, (1989) pointed out that there are rules to follow in choosing the scapegoat. In general, extreme, and special groups are more likely to be chosen as scapegoats. Extreme subjects refer to those who are weak or strong in a group, rich or poor, and special refers to those who usually behave different from normal rules within the group. There was a fact that when Germany suffered from economic decline, the Jews had raised prices in their business, which made the suffering of the Germans even worse. As a result, the Jews were considered as a wealthy group at that time. Additionally, another important aspect was that the Jews were a wandering nation without a motherland. They have no national culture and territory of their own and can only submit to the jurisdiction of Germany. However, Germans had a discriminatory attitude towards people who did not form a strong background of their own. Therefore, the Jews are treated as a relatively weak group and then vulnerable to prejudice. Furthermore, the Communists' organization of strikes indeed exerted some influence in the economy of the nation so that the Germans considered them as having betrayed the country and the root of the failure of the war which led them to become another group of scapegoats to suffer from prejudice by the Germans.

3.2. Control the Outcomes in World War I

3.2.1. Motivational Error

The Glick (2005) expressed that the scapegoat theory is manifested when a collective deliberately and unfairly attribute the cause of a problem towards an external group despite

the fact that the collective should be held responsible for the problem. This demonstrates the occurrence of a blatant social bias. Under a social environment that exhibits problems harming the interests of a core group, the scapegoat phenomenon will occur as the core group will attribute all causes of such problems towards an external group - frequently a less dominant one - and disregards an in-depth analysis upon the onset of social problems. The motive of utilizing the scapegoat theory should be avoided as it hinders one, or a group, from recognizing their own errors in progression. The German population after the First World War (WWI) demonstrates this theory, as they did not attribute the failure of the war effort to their own army. Instead, the German population blamed the Jewish and Communist social groups believing that their irresponsibility resulted in the lack of supplies to the army. This prejudicial accusation of the German people regarded the Jewish and Communist communities as scapegoats for the failure in WWI.

3.2.2. Solution

a) Establish Committee

Establishing effective means of communication between all parties through the form of a committee is a solution. Waweru, Kamau and Uliana (2011) proposed that setting up an audit committee in a market management agency could not only closer the relationship between internal and external auditors, but also improve the company's management level. Hence, it could be speculated that under a large social environment, the formation of a committee will represent a platform of communication between different parties, reducing the discrimination of internal groups against external groups. Moreover, analysis upon the causes of problems with assessments regarding the extent of punishment to individuals referring to the delegation of responsibilities are essential duties of the committee. The presence of the committee, composed by members from a variety of social groups, maintains the power balance and avoids the scapegoat phenomenon from occurring. The absence of a committee will inevitably lead to an imbalance of power benefiting the dominant group, and thus, the dominant group will be more likely to attribute causes of problems to external groups in avoiding punishments. In the WWI, if Germany established a committee to analyse the causes of defeat and distribute punishments based on a logical manner instead of finding the Jew and Community as scapegoats, the nation could have progressed on a more down-to-earth and steady development - in opposite to the occurrence and the eventual defeat in the Second World War (WWII).

b) Enhance Social Power

The enhancement and strengthening of one's social power and assets is an important factor in resisting the label of a 'scapegoat' and its associated punishments. Since the dominant party is always inclined to utilize its authority and resources in labelling and punishing 'scapegoats', it is important for the labelled groups to acquire resources that support their resistance towards the dominant group - instead of being passively subjected to the mistreatment associated with the illogical label of a 'scapegoat'. Specifically, the labelled groups should endeavor to find collaborators in enhancing their influence socially and economically - which fuels the resistance towards a dominant party. In reference to the aforementioned WWI example, if the Jewish and Communist community could have strived to find ways in acquiring more resources and influence in the German society, perhaps they would have not been labelled scapegoats.

4. Social Identity Theory: Feeling Superior to Others

4.1. Explain Certain Phenomenon in World War II

The First of all, the premise of social identity theory is social classification (Gerrig et al., 2010). A society is an aggregation composed of multiple different groups, in which each individual

acquires a self-concept through membership in the group. Groups are divided into in-group and out-group. In the process of classification, social comparison is inevitable, and the heterogeneity among groups is distinguished by the evaluation of other groups and the exaggeration of the differences between different categories. When making comparisons, people tend to label their group with positive characteristics to meet the needs for high self-esteem or self-motivation. This is the principle of positive differentiation (Jetten et al., 2001). Correspondingly, when there are contradictions and frictions between different groups, members of each group will actively defend the interests of their own group and belittle the other group. In the process of conflict, the degree of social identity is enhanced, which will deepen the contradictions between groups to some extent and form the stereotype of the out-group over time. This process is the formation of in-group bias. Prejudice could easily lead to racism, sexism and so forth (Gerrig et al., 2010).

Anti-Semitism referred to the deep and persistent European tradition of hostility to Jews, and aptly summed up the popular social mentality in Germany that loathes and hates the Jews. From the perspective of the social identity theory, the prevalence of anti-Semitism in German society is related to the long-standing German prejudice against Jews as an out-group. Firstly, the Germans had a general aversion and hatred towards Jews in religious sentiment (Brustein & King, 2004). Christianity originates from Judaism, but it has a huge difference from Judaism. Induced by Christian anti-Semitism, Christians developed the mentality of loathing and hating Jews, and gradually evolved into a general social mentality of extremely detesting the Jews. Secondly, with the development of secular life and social economy in Europe, the status of business and loan industry was increasingly prominent. The Jews became the main role of economy in early Western Europe, and many Jews became rich merchants and money lenders with huge wealth. The economic status of Jews and ordinary Germans formed a huge contrast. This great contrast further deepened the prejudice that the Jews was the greedy exploiters of the Germans and the source of all the evils that afflicted the loyal and industrious Germans (Antoniou & Kosmidis, 2020). Finally, the modern Renaissance and the Enlightenment further vilified the Jews in spiritual culture. For instance, the image of Shylock in the Merchant of Venice had become the archetypal Jewish usurer, and The Last Supper, A Judas Kiss. This popular in-group prejudice gradually turned into a kind of cultural precipitation which combined with the society, politics and economy, and evolved a type of social and political spiritual force that could be used at any time and had irrational, potential and inflammatory power to the people (Elias, 2001).

The German prejudice against Jews had formed a habitual thinking in the Minds of Germans. When confrontation or dissatisfaction becomes a habit, it would evolve into the label for another group, namely prejudice. On the contrary, what is interesting is that German Jews made great efforts for the reunification of Germany, for the national and national identity of Germany. Historical studies showed that German Jews has have a strong sense of identity with their homeland. The vast majority of them fully identified with the German nationality and integration, and devoted themselves to the cause of the German state, expecting to get equal rights with the mainstream people (Niewyk, 2011). However, some members of Germany's mainstream society did not buy into the efforts of the Jews to integrate into the society. They were skeptical of the Assimilation of the Jews, and even regarded the Jews' active participation in the country's social and cultural life as "human invasion and conquest". This is because people tend to devalue information that contradicts their stereotypes (Antoniou & Kosmidis, 2020).

4.2.   Control the Outcomes in World War II

The Generally speaking, social unity is the identity of a group and the sense of belonging towards it.And in a group, the individual always individuation and acts collectively. (Hongg,

2016) Based on the social identity theory, individuals would classify people into different groups. People tend to favor those members belonging to their inner group, which as a result forms the illusion that members of their inner group are definitely better than those of the outer group. This phenomenon helps to explain why German police have prejudice against the Jews due to the identity factor. In addition, when a few police officers tried to protect Jews, they came under pressure from the group. This situation will cause individuals to give up their own behavior and choose to follow the collective behavior. Besides, it is the prejudice against outsiders that prevents the German police from genuinely protecting the Jews since they are not treated as inner group members. This kind of judgment is totally based upon subjective views without referring to objective facts, and one way to weaken the influence of social identity theory is that individuals should improve their sense of self and think independently. When making judgments, individuals ought to remind themselves to base their judgments on objective facts rather than rely on own subjective consciousness towards the group. And in the case of collective behavior, individuals should keep their wits about them to avoid blindly following the crowd.

Social identity theory causes individuals to divide the whole population into in-group and out-group where the in-group bias occurs when individuals make attributions.(Hongg,2016) Based on this theory, individuals tend to believe that the success of the in-group is due to their own efforts and the failure of the out-group is also due to the group's own defects. Individuals make social comparisons in order to make positive evaluations of the internal group and devalue other groups in order to improve their self-esteem(Trepte&Loy, 2017). This kind of thinking neglects other possibilities when making attributions and may cause the appearance of illusion that the inner group is definitely superior than others. This judgment excludes the possible influence of external factors and finally strengthens the in-group bias.

The implementation of Hitler's racism policy gradually classified the German into in-group and the Jews as out-group. This result leads individuals in the inner group to believe that Jews are sinful and that they themselves are superior. This is the reason why Hitler's policy of killing the Jews had obtained national support at that time. German citizens held the belief that the inner group members are better than the Jews so that in order to save the country, they definitely supported the killing policy which is actually cruel and false. Thus, another way to help us avoid being influences by the in-group bias is to remind ourselves to look more thoroughly into the causes of out-of-group failures. In addition, individuals should try to analyze whether there are any external causes of the event and remind themselves to take the external causes into consideration when the inner group succeeds. In this way, one's judgment will be more comprehensive and objective, so as to avoid being influenced by the social identity theory.

5. Conclusion

Based on the above discussion, we can know that the frustration-aggression theory and the social identity theory had some bad influences on Germany after World War One. Because Germany was defeated during the First World War, it was forced into some unequal agreements. At this time, Germany suffered a significant loss because of the defeat. The German people suffered deeply and needed an outlet to vent their accumulated discontent. During the First World War, Germans prided themselves on Germany's previous record, so much so that the public had a high sense of national identity. After the defeat, they did not believe in the fact that their country would fail miserably because of their sense of superiority. Therefore, it was impossible for them to attribute the failure to the German military. As a result, to address the negativity of these setbacks, they blamed the defeat on price gouging by Jewish traders and infighting among Democrats and Republicans. Jews and Republicans have become the target of mass venting. Since then, the Republican Party has stepped down and German discrimination

against Jews was become more and more serious. Even Jews were massacred by the Nazis during the Second World War.

However, these theories often occur in people's daily life. Take an example of the frustration-aggression theory that might be used in everyday life. If a person is criticized by his boss for being late for work, he may attribute the delay to being stuck in traffic for too long. And then, he may become dissatisfied with the transportation system and may abuse it to vent his negative feelings about being criticized by his boss. Although the fact may be that the person is late due to the overslept, he does not reflect on his own mistakes. And he also complains that the external environment does not accommodate him. Thus, it can be seen that this theory will have a bad influence on the development of individuals. It prevents people from discovering their problems and does little to help them overcome difficulties.

The phenomenon of in-group bias in social identity theory occurs within groups, such as different races, different genders, and different age groups. For example, in the United States, some white people discriminate against black people. Those white people with a discriminatory mentality have a sense of superiority over their skin color and have strong stereotypes and rejection of black people. According to Paetzel and Sausgruber (2018), The group with excellent performance is more likely to have in-group bias than the group with poor performance. One reason for discrimination may be the low background of black ancestors. Blacks with poor ancestral backgrounds were less likely to have in-group biases, but whites with good traditional backgrounds were more likely to have strong biases against people of other races. This prejudice exacerbates racial segregation and estrangement in the United States.

These theories have been of great harm to society and individuals both during world War I and in contemporary times. For the progress of society, people should keep a right attitude, face difficulties positively, and treat others and things equally. Prejudice is eliminated when people of different personalities can be united.

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