Concepts of „Race“ in the History of the Humanities

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Recent scholarship has documented the presence of „race“ in virtually every branch of the humanities, but there has not been a collective attempt to address this history across the humanities as a whole in a broader, comparative, cross-disciplinary, and cross-national context. Against this background, AMOS MORRIS-REICH (University of Haifa) and DIRK RUPNOW (Institut für Zeitgeschichte der Universität Innsbruck) had invited nineteen international scholars from various disciplines to the University of Haifa to discuss the different concepts of race in the history of the humanities and provide such an inclusive approach. Unfortunately, Dirk Rupnow was unable to attend the conference due to illness.

As AMOS MORRIS-REICH pointed out in his opening remarks – reflecting the ideas of both organizers –, several questions guided the whole conference: How characteristic were historical instances that have been documented for whole disciplines such as archeology or art history? How integrated were notions of race into the humanistic methods of study such as philology? Did notions of race undergo significant transformations? Were there fields that were particularly vulnerable to notions of race, and why? What were the implications of the presence of notions of race, and what was at stake? Is the subject solely historical, or, similarly to genetics, is this field relevant for contemporary scholarship? What were the questions that notions of race in the humanities came to answer? While the Nazi context is an obvious and necessary one in the study of race, the conference focused primarily on less radical contexts – although Nazi Germany naturally remained at the subtext of the discussions.

SANDER GILMAN initiated the conference by giving an overview about the use of „race“. In the 21st century, Gilman argued, older, predictable biological categories such as „race“ have reappeared. New genetic data has enabled scientists to re-examine the relationship between human genetic variation and „race“. Referring to alleged „Jewish genetic disease“ Gilman claimed that genetic clusters are also correlated with some traditional concepts of race, but that the correlations were imperfect because genetic variation tends to be distributed in a continuous, overlapping fashion among populations. Therefore, ancestry, or even race, may in some cases prove useful in the biomedical setting, but direct assessment of disease-related genetic variation will ultimately yield more accurate and beneficial information. The contemporary most frequent commercial use of DNA testing in the US is to check paternity – as Gilman asked: „Do you really know who your Daddy is?“

JOAN-PAU RUBIES contended that although in early modern Europe and up to the mid eighteenth century cultural diversity was usually explained with reference to religion, climate and national genealogy, without any serious equivalent to racist ideologies, the possible connections between earlier ideas and the stronger theories of the late 18th and early 19th centuries cannot be entirely dismissed. He pointed out that various constituent elements of later racist thought existed but did not constitute a dominant discourse in early modern Europe.

As SUSANNE LETTOW pointed out, the concept of race has been articulated in classical German philosophy in several different ways. Lettow argued that the reflections on „race“ are linked with central philosophical projects and questions, particularly in the works of Kant and Hegel. At the beginning of the 19th century „race“ coexisted not only with older classificatory concepts, but also with similar or competing concepts, like the people and the nation, or Hegel's geopolitical concept of race.

MARTIN REISIGL claimed that the word and the concept of race in the works of philologists and linguists published during the last two centuries have always been obscure and heavily obfuscated, and the relationship between languages and alleged human races has always been an ideologically based pseudo-scientific fantasy. Reisigl pointed out that

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linguistics have not pushed ahead with critical metalinguistic reflection and radical deconstruction or destruction and abolition of the concept of „race“ in their reconstructive work on racializing linguistics and philology. The spectre of human races still wanders and floats around in highly important work on the topic in discussion as an unquestioned presupposition. Reisigl assumed that one of the reasons for this lack of criticism with respect to the idea of human races is due to the lack of interdisciplinary orientation of linguists towards work in other disciplines, for instance, genetics and sociology.

VERONIKA LIPPHARDT demonstrated that „race“ was a multifaceted and well embedded concept in the theoretical framework of the life sciences throughout the 19th and 20th century. To transfer this notion to the history of the humanities she suggested analyzing how heavily and how explicit scholars from the humanities relied on concepts and results from the biological sciences, or whether they simply took up vague elements from a broader discourse that supported the understanding of isolated human groups and their history by both science and humanities. She also suggested differentiating „race concepts“ in the humanities with regard to their conceptual proximity to certain biological concepts, for example whether parts of classifications or evolutionary mechanisms were taken over or whether humankind as a whole was in the focus or only one particular human group.

The art section of the conference was commenced by KIMBERLEY PINDER who focused on the complex and conflicting ways in which artists of color perceived themselves within a European modernist tradition. Pinder sees a new generation of historians of African American art who openly and forthrightly resist the methodology of victimization. She argued that with the formation of art histories of other underrepresented and oppressed groups like women, and indigenous and developing world peoples, African American art history has consistently anchored its existence against a history of racism and negative imagery by whites.

In her remarkable contribution, MARGARET OLIN pointed out that at the beginning of the 20th century, art history and anthropology had the same methods and the same results: both disciplines described closely, and those descriptions resulted in types. Behind these descriptions were serious debates about origins: stylistic origins, origins of the species, origins of the human race. As Olin pointed out, the types described by the anthropologist, the scientist, and the art historian are all depictions. But depictions are themselves interpretations. What was analyzed was according to Olin not an object, but rather a schema derived from an object. Such schemata, she said, were necessary, but confusing them for reality caused mistakes in science, faulty attributions and even racism.

CHARLES L. DAVIS II, who was the third and last speaker on the art section, examined the role architectural organicisms played in promoting the theoretical integration of race and style thinking in German tectonics. He carefully located the intersections between the architectural concepts of Formfindung, Bekleidung and Motiv and the scientific concepts of Bildungstrieb and Kunsttrieb, and interpreted how tectonic theorists inscribed racial characters within their conception of style in the nineteenth-century.

DANI SCHRIRE, when talking about Jews as a folk and as a race in early Jewish folkloristics, mainly focused on the work of Max Grunwald, who is considered the father of Jewish folkloristics. Schrire closely traced the folkloristic debates at the beginning of the 19th century, when Grunwald, for whom „race“ was an unstable concept, was isolated.

NICOLAS BERG focused on the conference „Jewry in Jurisprudence“ (1936), organized by Hans Frank and Carl Schmitt, where more than 100 economists, legal scholars and psychologists met. Berg provided astonishing details of the conference talks that today are a prominent document of anti-Semitic and racist argumentations in the Humanities of the 1930s.

The religion section of the conference was started by GEORGE WILLIAMSON, who discussed the later philosophy of Friedrich Schelling (1775 – 1854) in the standard histories of nineteenth-century racial thought. Schellings later philosophy has until now usually been interpreted in terms of the „end

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of idealism“ or as an opening up (within idealism) to the „real.“ Williamson demonstrated that this move toward the „real“ also entailed a serious engagement with race, which in Schelling's philosophy was conceived as not just one aspect of human diversity but as an integral part of what he called the „ethnogonic process.“ In bringing together religion and a quasi-modern theory of race, Schelling anticipated the writings of later racial theorists, notably Arthur de Gobineau and Richard Wagner. Williamson showed that the roots of the late nineteenth-century racialist discourse can be found not just in early nineteenth-century linguistics, philology, or anthropology but also in the study of religion and in particular the study of ancient mythology.

DENISE KIMBER BUELL examined the proposition that „race“ emerged in part from Christian theological epistemes. Buell suggested that some of the ways in which „race“ and „religion“ as well as ethnicity, nationality and even culture bear the traces of a Christian theological heritage can be found in how they travel as concepts that are used to negotiate assertions of invisible essences made visible materially and perhaps even are material forces that bind together human groups.

In his insightful paper, MICHAEL P. STEINBERG posed the question whether Wagner was still dangerous and unfolded precisely that Siegmund („Ring of the Nibelung“) is the embodiment of a complicated and ambivalent Jewish fantasy, both philo-Semitic and anti-Semitic. Identification with Siegmund, argued Steinberg, means identification with ambiguity in general but most of all with this specific ambiguity of Germanness and Jewishness, Deutschtum and Judentum. Wagner is, concluded Steinberg, indeed dangerous, at times because he inscribed racist stereotypes into his creative work. But he is also dangerous because of his invitation to his audiences to hear and to identify with profound ambiguities in psychological and moral as well as cultural and political positions. Identification with Siegmund means identification with ambiguity, which is dangerous for ideology. But in Israel the voice of Siegmund should continue to be silent. If the abiding Wagner taboo in Israel silences Siegmund, it is not a German, Wagnerian, or indeed anti-Semitic voice that is being suppressed, but rather a certain Jewish voice and Jewish subject-position. Because the true object of taboo is the self that requires it. The Wagner taboo in Israel, then, becomes a signal about what is inadmissible in the Israeli self. And that, Steinberg argued, is an ambiguity in the constitution of Jewishness.

ANNA G. PIOTROWSKA, aside from presenting the general outline of the concept of race in musicological thought, presented a case study of so called „Gypsy music“ as an example of racism. The dominating, even in current times, image of Gypsyness in music, argued Piotrowska, was basically an effect of its 19th century interpretation when such influential intellectual modes as orientalism, racism and nationalism shaped the concept of *Gypsyness* in music as a social construct. The intellectual climate of the first half of the 20th century favored the idea of perceiving musical and racial issues together.

SUZANNE L. MARCHAND wondered why long into the modern era, discussions of human antiquity and of race continued to be shaped by interpretations of the Old Testament, in spite of secularizing pressures, the expansion of colonialism, and the rise of Darwinism and the natural sciences. She argued that the response of oriental philology to the problem of Near Eastern chronology resulted in the pioneering of innovative means to push beyond the difficulties inherent in their source materials, in ways that unlocked both racialized and prejudicial prehistories, but also opened for us a wider and broader set of religious and cultural histories of humankind.

NIGEL ELTRINGTHAM concerned himself with the place of the „Hamite“ in European writing since the mid-19th Century. The presentation of the Tutsi as „Hamites“ was to be a central element in the 1950s and emerged again in the early 1990s as an element of anti-Tutsi rhetoric leading up to the genocide of April to July 1994 in which up to one million ethnic Tutsi were killed. According to Eltringham, the same process occurred in Europe concerning „Nordic“, contributing to discourses implicated in the Shoah. As Eltringham argued, these distinctions can be traced to French anthropologist Joseph

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Deniker (1852-1918), who introduced a new term, „ethnic group", to denote entities constituted by the combination of „language … religion, and especially, social institution" and that these are distinct from „race" as determined solely by physical characteristics.

CHRISTOPHER HUTTON premised that the concept of *Volk* is the fundamental concept within European identity theorizing and oscillating between two semiotic extremes: a ritual one, where the framework for understanding human society and human actions in relation to the social and cosmic order is provided by a set of sacred texts, and the idea that identity begins with the human body, which is understood as marked by race. But the focus on race theory, argued Hutton, as the primary source of socio-political and ideological pathologies is problematic. Instead, Hutton claimed, we need to understand the interactions, tensions and overlaps between what he called 'semiotic orders'. In particular contexts, he contended, phonocentrism can be just as powerful as ideas of race in creating ethnocentric or xenophobic models of identity.

DEREK CH. CATSAM pointed out how the development of South African historical writing has reflected the inextricable interconnections between race, racism and the historical profession. Race, claims Catsam, still matters in South Africa.

Finally, BRADLEY W. HART discussed how the Humanities were used as the foundation of international eugenics. It was only by combining the explanatory power of science, racial and otherwise, with the examples provided by the humanities and history that eugenics could create its all encompassing explanation of the world and program for the future. Hurt sees a relationship between notions of race, the humanities, and eugenic theory.

All in all, the conference represents an important first step for the creation of an inclusive and inter-disciplinary history of the concept of „race" in the humanities.

Konferenzübersicht:

Opening and Keynote

Amos Morris-Reich (Department of Jewish History and Director, Bucerius Institute, University of Haifa): Welcome & Introduction

Sander Gilman (Department of Liberal Arts and Sciences, Emory University): Why is studying the concept of race a topic for the 21st century?

Foundations I
Chair/Respondent: Rotem Kowner (Department of Asian Studies,University of Haifa)

Joan-Pau Rubiés (Department of International History, The London School of Economics and Political Sciences): Were early-modern Europeans racist?

Susanne Lettow (Institute for Human Sciences IWM, Vienna): Genealogies of Race. German Philosophy from Kant to Hegel

Foundations II
Chair/Respondent: Snait Gissis (Cohn Institute for the History and Philosophy of Science and Ideas, Tel Aviv University)

Veronika Lipphardt (Max Planck Institute for the History of Science): „Race" in the Humanities? Biological notions of Origin and Diversity

Martin Reisigl (Department of Linguistics, University of Vienna): Linguistic Racialisation. Observations on the dreadful contribution of linguistics to racism

Art
Chair/Respondent: Esther Levinger (Department of Art History, University of Haifa)

Kymberly Pinder (Department of Art History, Theory and Criticism, The School of the Art, Institute of Chicago): Seeing is Believing: Race and the (De)Formation of Art History

Margaret Olin (Yale Divinity School): Formal Analysis: Art and Anthropology

Charles L. Davis II (Department of Art History, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill): From Ornament to Abstraction: The Shifting Integrations of Race and Style Theory in Modern Architecture

Folklore and Economical Theory
Chair/Respondent: Sergio DellaPergola (Harman Institute of Contemporary Jewry, Hebrew University of Jerusalem)

Dani Schrire (The Jewish and Comparative

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Folklore Program, The Hebrew University of Jerusalem): Jews as a Folk and as a Race in early Jewish Folkloristics

Nicolas Berg (Simon Dubnow Institute for Jewish History and Culture, University of Leipzig): Racism and „Völkerpsychologie“ in the German speaking Political Economy, 1918–1938

Religion
Chair/Respondent: Fania Oz-Salzberger (Faculty of Law, University of Haifa and Department of Modern Israel Studies, Monash University)

George Williamson (Department of History, Florida State University): Religion and Race in Friedrich Schelling's Philosophy of Mythology

Denise Kimber Buell (Professor of Religion, Williams College): „Race“ in the Formation of the Study of Religion

Musicology
Chair/Respondent: Ruth HaCohen (Scholion Research Center in Jewish Studies, Hebrew University of Jerusalem)

Michael P. Steinberg (Department of History and Department of Music, Brown University, USA): Is Wagner (Still) Dangerous?

Anna G. Piotrowska (Instituteof Musicology, Jagellonian University of Krakow): The concept of race in musicological thought – from general remarks to the case study of so-called „Gypsy music“ in European culture

Regions
Chair/Respondent: Zur Shalev (Department of General History and Department of Land of Israel Studies, University of Haifa)

Suzanne L. Marchand (Department of History, Louisiana State University): Race, Religion and the Problem of Near Eastern Prehistory

Nigel Eltringham (Department of Anthropology, University of Sussex): Joseph Deniker and the Rise (and Fall) of Scientific Racism

Christopher Hutton (School of English, University of Hong Kong): Phonocentrism and the concept of Volk: the case of modern China

History
Chair/Respondent: Mitchell Ash (Department of History, University of Vienna)

Derek Ch. Catsam (Department of History, University of Texas of the Permian Basin): From Apartheid to Liberation: Race, History and South African Historiography

Bradley W. Hart (Churchill College, Cambridge University): Racial History: Using the Humanities as the Foundation for International Eugenics

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