

Colonial Subjects of Health and Difference: Races, Populations, Diversities

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Held at the Max Planck Institute for the History of Science, the conference 'Colonial Subjects of Health and Difference: Races, Populations, Diversities' aimed to identify connections between the scientific study of human variation and colonial practices of health and governance in the early twentieth century. The ingredients of the conference papers were: race, science, colonizers and colonized subjects, health policies and classification. As we will see below, contributors focused on these issues by analysing the science and colonial policies of race mixing, specific diseases, malnutrition, reproduction, criminality and labour in settings quite nicely distributed all over the world.

The researchers who hosted the conference – the Max Planck research group led by Veronika Lipphardt - share an interest in the diverse ways in which life scientists have made sense of human diversity. For this occasion, as organizers SANDRA WIDMER (Berlin) and VERONIKA LIPPHARDT (Berlin) stated in their introductory remarks, they hoped to expose and study the spaces where epistemic and political operations became entangled.

Avoiding any exact definition of the concept of race, the research group looks at those human differences the historical actors perceive to be geographically patterned, transmitted from generation to generation and not easily changed in a lifetime. This made it possible to look at all sorts of colonial narratives and their undertones of fixity, race and cultural difference. As KATHARINA SCHRAMM (Halle-Wittenberg) noted in the final remarks, it was striking how the conference papers each pointed to the slippages between biological categorizations and other (cultural, social or sexual) categories.

In his keynote lecture (which can be found

on youtube for those who are interested), WARWICK ANDERSON (Sydney) focused on entangled epistemologies rather than governance. He took the audience to the central Australian mission community of Hermannsburg, visited in 1929 by several psychologists who wanted to investigate the 'primitive' mentality of the local Arrernte. The investigators represented different styles of scientific inquiry - from psychological testing to Freudian dream collection. But while they hoped to explain the Arrernte mind from these different perspectives, they each inescapably reflected on the western mind and the achievements and shortcomings of white civilization. In the papers of the conference, this co-production of the other and the self resurfaced several times.

HANS POLS' (Sydney) paper about the group of mixed race Indo-Europeans in the Netherlands East Indies showed how their classification varied according to social sphere: An Indo-European man could be legally European but would not be allowed in a gentlemen's club. These classificatory confusions were also reflected in the failed attempts to study Indo-Europeans scientifically: scientists complained about the lack of statistics about this ill-defined group. In Brazil on the other hand, as ANDRÉ FELIPE CÂNDIDO DA SILVA (Rio de Janeiro) showed, German scientists in the 1930s were producing their own statistics when they measured and observed a group of Germans who had lived in Brazil for generations to study their acclimatization. They were happy to conclude that the physical characteristics of the Brazilian Germans had not changed over time nor had their capacity and eagerness to work hard, an important aspect of Germanness and no less hereditary than physical features.

In one of two papers on diseases, SARAH EHLERS (Berlin) showed how sleeping sickness was conceptualized as an African disease. Africanness here included both biological and social attributes: Africans were thought to differ from their colonizers in skin colour but also in habits of hygiene and clothing. When it was realized that Europeans could contract the disease too, one doctor suggested that Europeans could prevent the disease by wearing white coats to avoid mos-

quitoes and by having their servants wear black ones. Whiteness here was literally thought to protect people. In contrast with sleeping sickness, as JEAN-PAUL BADO (Aix-en-Provence) argued, cancer was seen as a European disease, a disease of life-style and civilization. Debates about the existence and causes of cancer in Africa in the first half of the twentieth century comprised new constructions of the African as a noble savage or as people now tainted by modernity like Europeans.

Two papers set in the Pacific dealt with labour and colonial governance. JULIE PARK and JUDITH LITTLETON (Auckland) showed how people of the Ellice Islands were chosen over those of the Gilbert Islands as a workforce in hospitals with the argument that they were more suitable for taking orders but debates about the salary of half-caste nurses shows that these were less comfortably situated. Unlike most of the other papers, this paper emphasised how human difference was created in daily health practice and not in scientific research. ANTJE KÜHNAST (Sydney) showed that the inhabitants of the island of Nauru were described in a variety of ways by the various colonizers that dealt with them but that when they refused to work in the mines this was blamed on the fact that they were racially unfit.

A panel on nutrition showed how scientific discussions about nutrition used a normative male body that made the colonial body seem inferior. MARIA LETÍCIA GALLUZZI BIZZO (Rio de Janeiro) illustrated that by focusing on discussions on the diets of 'rice-eaters' who were set apart as people who differed in bio-typology and thus needed different diets. BARBARA COOPER (New Brunswick) on the other hand showed how racial markers of French West African populations were studied to find answers to nutrition problems but that the outcomes had hardly any impact. The racial maps of the scientists did not manage to explain anything while political economy was entirely ignored.

Two papers dealt with criminality and at the same time with scientists outside European circles. OMNIA EL SHAKRY (Davis) argued that hitherto race has been a neglected factor in studies of Egyptian scientific discour-

se because of the idea that indigenous people would have no use for it. By looking at ideas about criminality among Egyptian scholars from the 1940s onwards she showed how crime became associated with particular populations. Scientists divided people in north versus south or urban versus rural with racial undertones to explain Egyptian crime rates. JIN-KYUNG PARK (Toronto) illustrated how a Japanese racial discourse worked towards the colonized Koreans, who were considered different but also racially close which made them all the more dangerous. In dealing with the diagnosis of husband murder in Korea, Japanese scientists used two explanatory frameworks: that of physiology and that of bad governance by Korean dynasties, underlining difference and justifying Japanese colonial presence.

Reproduction was another area of scientific interest and political practices. SANDRA WIDMER (Berlin) analysed the anxieties about decreasing populations, a wrong sex ratio and the high bride price that was thought to be the reason behind the decline in the New Hebrides. The British then attempted to regulate the bride price and their narratives show, according to Widmer, different registers which linked thinking about kinship, race and sex. A similar anxiety about reproduction was present in German East Africa where, as DANIEL BENDIX (Manchester) showed, German scientists explained low reproduction by stressing the physical peculiarity of East African women, secret abortive practices and deficient midwifery while dismissing factors like the hardships after the recent Maji Maji war. Women were then turned into special objects of population politics and control in hospitals.

In the discussions that followed the papers, two issues came up repeatedly. First was the agency of colonial subjects: how did it feel like to be studied and be moved around by colonial scientists and administrators? Some of the presenters focussed on the indigenous population by describing refusals to be disciplined and confusions among scientists while others emphasised the importance of using indigenous sources and reflecting on the colonial archive and its paper trail. Warwick Anderson described how he visited Hermannsburg with the hope of finding traces of scientific work in

folklore memories but did not find any. This, he suggested, perhaps indicated a lack of interest in the matter. Secondly, discussions dealt with the way some populations were considered more valuable for scientists than others. Scientists were looking for ideal field sites of isolation or race mixing all over the world, but the question whether the islands of the Pacific gave this region a distinct quality in contrast to the landmasses of Africa or South America needs further investigation.

In his final remarks, Warwick Anderson praised the global scope of the conference and suggested that instead of comparing places it might be worth following people or ideas around, such as the tropical doctor Ernst Rodenwaldt who popped up in the Dutch Indies, African Togo and Nazi Germany in three different papers. Anderson also suggested bringing a next conference more clearly in discussion with specific scholars, to make more explicit which schools of thought scholars of race, science and colonial governance would like to follow or stay away from in their future research.

On the whole, the conference showed the myriad of ways in which political and epistemic narratives of diversity were connected and demonstrated that many insights can still be gained from continuing academic exchange about this topic.

Conference Overview:

Keynote Lecture

Warwick Anderson (Sydney): Hermannsburg, 1929: Turning Aboriginal [U+02BB] Primitives [U+02BC] into Modern Psychological Subjects

Panel I Diversities in Administrative Categories: Recruiting Labour and Defining Legal Status

Chair: Joanna Radin (Yale University)

Hans Pols (Sydney): Indo-Europeans and Race-Mixing: Defining the „Indo“ in the Dutch East Indies and Beyond

Julie Park / Judith Littleton (Auckland): Classifying Colonial Subjects for Health Purposes

Antje Ku`hnast (Sydney): Whose „Pleasant Island“? German Colonial Endeavours in Go-

verning the Populations of Nauru, 1888-1914
Reflections

Carlos Lopez Beltran (National Autonomous University of Mexico)

Panel II Diversities in Explanations and Method: Health Status of Populations I

Chair: Daniel Walther (Wartburg College)

Jean-Paul Bado (Aix-en-Provence): Cancer During the Colonial Period in Francophone Africa

André Felipe Cândido da Silva (Rio de Janeiro): Race, Health and Colonial Politics of the Third Reich: the Nauck and Gien-sa [U+02BC]s Expedition to Espírito Santo, Brazil, 1936

Panel III Diversities in Explanations and Method: Health Status of Populations II

Chair: Christine Winter, University of Queensland

Sarah Ehlers (Berlin): Medical Missions - Racial Visions? Fighting Sleeping Sickness in Colonial Africa 1900-1940s

Reflections

Ricardo Ventura Santos (Rio de Janeiro)

Panel IV Food Supplies and the Classification of Difference: Governing Populations, Nutrition and Political Economy

Chair: J. Emmanuel Raymundo, University of Pennsylvania

Maria Leticia Galluzzi Bizzo (Rio de Janeiro): The „Rice-eaters“ in Colonial and International Nutrition Science (1935-1950)

Barbara M. Cooper (Rutgers University): The Gender of Malnutrition in the AOF: Nutritional Science and the Evasion of Political Economy

Panel V Difference and the Fertility of Populations: The Colonial Regulation of Reproduction

Chair: Samuel Coghe (Florence)

Sandra Widmer (Berlin): Low Fertility and the High Bride Price: Imbalanced Sex-Ratios, Human Variation and the Colonial Regulation of

Reproduction in the New Hebrides (Vanuatu)

Daniel Bendix (Manchester): German Colonial Interventions into Birthing and Abortion Practices & the Quest for Control of Population in East Africa

Panel VI The Methodological Significance of Diversities: Statistics, Biomedicine and the (Re-)Making of Difference

Chair: Susanne Bauer, Goethe University Frankfurt am Main

Jin-kyung Park (Toronto): Racial Proximity, Anxiety of Empire: Biomedicine, Female Deviancy, and the Making of the Colonial Body in Korea under Japanese Rule (1910-1945)

Omnia El Shakry (Davis): Criminal Subjects of Knowledge: Race into Region in Twentieth Century Egypt

Final Discussion

Katharina Schramm, (Halle-Wittenberg)

Warwick Anderson (Sydney)

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