

Race: A Stereotype

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In a typological and racial classification, the hypothesis is that races have existed at a “pure” level, before migrations would result in a large mixing. In this way of thinking, one forgets that migrations have always existed and thus gene flow too. When groups meet, they may or may not breed, but they always breed.

Typological works and the myth of inequalities of races, but also the eugenetical atmosphere, will feed nazism and will result in the awful acts of nazi Germany. However, even the nazism of the third Reich and even the Reich’s university of Strasbourg and its terrible experiences will never be able to correctly define the concept of race on a biological basis. To define the “Jewish” concept, nazism will have to accept that the religious character is still the more operational.

In front of the continuous distribution (in “clines”) of the morphological or biochemical characters, which makes any racial demarcation arbitrary, anthropologists prefer to reject the typological concept. Moreover, typology is sterilising the study of the human variability origin and its comprehension, as it is also occulting the dynamical study of populations and the study of environmental interactions.

Groups and categories of biological traits may present some advantages if a clear classification could be realized; but if the categories are unprecise, they cannot be of any use. The concept of race, such as that of cline or population, is an abstraction used to organise information coming from some data but it is not a real fact.

In anthropology, we need to objectively study human variability; from this point of view racial classification, proposing pseudo-solutions to non existing problems, is a loss of energy. Moreover, it is creating a mental predisposition which could be a door open to racism.

In the daily language, the term “race” is still used to nominate sociological groups in a complex society, but does not have any biological meaning. For instance, Hindus are considered “white” in the USA but “coloured” in the United Kingdom (as well as, e.g, the Chinese and Pakistani). In South-Africa, during the apartheid, they were considered a race and the “coloured” people were here represented by

individuals of mixed origin. Another example is the use of the term “black” population: a mulatto of first generation coming from one parent of African origin and one of European origin receives as much genetical information from the father than from the mother, i.e. from African than European ancestral origin, but practically in all societies this mulatto is considered belonging to the black population. The biological reality does not correspond to the sociological situation. In some American states, an individual having only 1/8 of black ancestral origin is considered belonging to the black race. Besides, according to the Nuremberg laws of 1935, a very far Jewish origin was sufficient to be considered as Jewish.

We continue to speak using stereotypes as whites or blacks, Arabs or Jewish, ..., amalgamating biological and cultural traits, accentuating economical or socio-political ideologies. We still go on mixing culture and civilisation on one side and genetical pool on the other side, nations and populations. We forget that political oppositions are often occurring between closely related populations such as Irish and English, Hutus and Tutsis, Arabs and Jewish, Bosniacs, Serbs and Croatsians. For instance, the data relative to the polymorphism of blood groups, proteins, HLA, etc. show that the genetical distances between Jewish and non-Jewish neighbouring populations are lower than those among Jewish populations, often coming from geographically very distant places.

Our knowledge of the past and present human variability has radically changed in the last decade on the basis of scientific progress in genetics, palaeontology, anthropology, ethology and also (and perhaps even more) on the basis of mental and sociological modifications. Anthropologists are nowadays studying the variability of real populations and not more of imagined entities; they know that populations never remain isolated, that genic flow is constantly existing and that clines of gradual variation are existing. Anthropology has to study human beings as they are and not as one would like them to be.

In the spirit of a typological thinking, one still neglect too much the biological variation inherent to each population and focus only on variations between groups. We know, however, that the largest

part of the human variation, morphological as well as biochemical, is this part of the variation observed within a population. Today, anthropology must not only be practised in a competent way taking into account these observations, but also on a morally justified way in the spirit of equality of human rights.

PRESENT CONTRADICTIONS

The demographic explosion has many consequences in the degradation of the environment and of the quality of life as well as in a decrease of individual freedoms. Drastic measures must be taken to reduce the dimension of populations in order to give to future generations a correct quality of life and a sustainable development.

Another consequence of the demographic pressure can be observed in the many migratory movements, even if migration factors are often complex and include, for instance, economical, ecological and political motivations (war situations, absence of democracy,...). Moreover, our world is nowadays "a global village" where education and televisual information diffuse and idealise images of the "rich" societies of the North, stimulating, in fact, migration of those who do not desire to live anymore in the conditions of poverty of their countries of origin.

The differences between North and South continue to increase. But, it is difficult to imagine that the current politics of mondialisation and globalisation will continue with an increasing tendency to social exclusion, violence, degradation of the environment, cultural and political underdevelopment, a situation which not only is immoral but also inhuman. The populations which are obliged to live in unfair conditions, devoid of all that they know is existing in the rest of the world, will not remain forever without protesting.

The Humankind must find solutions to essential questions such as:

- the demographic explosion;
- the limitation of the planetary resources (less than 1 billion people could consume as Europeans are doing today);
- the development of education at world level;
- the equality and respect between populations (very often announced);
- the equality and respect between individuals (even more often announced).

The increasing disparities of economical and social conditions between North and South are the background of migration and illegal movements

towards the European Union. However, rather curiously, instead of discussing political conditions to decrease these disparities, the essential political decisions concern the "humanitary" conditions occurring to migrants the way back home, what the Red Cross and the High Commission of Refugees call elegantly (and hypocritely) the "level of humanitarian tolerance".

With migration, racism is developing, and neo-fascists or extreme right parties are appearing using the hostility to migrants to collect a popular adhesion. In the United Kingdom, France, Germany, Italy and Belgium, for instance, the north-African or African immigration could have, in this way, an important political impact.

The paradox of the modern European societies lays in its opening to the clandestine circulation of foreign working forces and, at the same time, in repressing it. Political decisions susceptible to stimulate racist reactions are, for instance :

- decisions leading to engage clandestine workers and at the same time to put in danger the general labour market ;
- decisions limiting the rights to citizenship and at the same time increasing the problems of public order;
- decisions leading to the decrease of syndical and solidarity movements' power and thus giving at the same time space to racism.

If racism developed in the European societies in relation with colonialism and a spirit of "white" superiority, however, since 1945 Western Europe has followed an internationalist and antiracist political line, at least at the level of left minded parties. But in the 1970s, racism against migrants increased again and this independently of skin colour or geographical origin : practically the same oppositions and attitudes are observed against Italian workers in Switzerland, Turkish in Germany or Black in the United Kingdom.

At the end of the 1980s, the same discriminations are still present but on a more differentiated way : intra-european migrants are much better accepted than the non-European migrants, phenotypically different and/or of Muslim culture. With the disappearance of communism, the anti-Jewish and anti-Gypsies racism is increasing again in the East-European countries also.

The old conception of "they are different from us" is often becoming a "they do not desire to be as us". In a subtle way, the new right-wing movements have recuperated the concept of "right to be different" that humanist movements used to defend the human

rights of certain persecuted population. These right-wing movements became even defenders of ethnic pluralism to justify discriminations and expulsions.

Taking some migrants as "ethnic opponents", new ways of racism are introduced in our societies and are receiving by the vote to extreme right-wing parties a democratic justification, paradoxically introducing the germs of the negation of democracy. This situation is an important part of the exclusions occurring frequently in our present societies : racism is giving an ethical image to exclusion and social hierarchies. Next to violent ways of racism, a kind of "soft" racism is developing.

In the past of racist ideas, races were supposed to protect their biological purities; today each culture is supposed to preserve its identity.

The racism based on ethnical inequalities often shows itself, on a daily basis, as multiple acts of exclusion, inferiorisation and marginalisation. Attitudes "legitimated" by supposed differences can be subtle and accompanied by ways of denying racism such as "I am not a racist, but ...". Moreover, racism being denied, an antiracist campaign is not judged necessary : racism would be present only in extreme right-wing parties where in other movements only discrimination and xenophobia would be present.

Let us be careful with all kind of philosophies of exclusion, nationalism and religious fanaticism which support fear, aggressivity and hate. We have to continue the eternal battle of free thinking. We are perhaps not totally free and equal, but let us have at least the fraternity which would have to lead the international politics and economy.

The common argument of the existence of some few large human races, based on traits seen as essential (skin colour for instance), has no biological validity and the observed differences are negligible in comparison to the biological differences observed between individuals of the same population. To separate and to group human populations is giving birth to arbitrary, and non natural, divisions. Populations are in fact local groups with bio-cultural unities in continuous change. The human species is a whole continuum where clines, following geographical factors, can be described in function of ecological factors or gene flows and where the only real barriers are of cultural nature (linguistical, behavioural, linked to clothes, ...). Today, the notion of human race has lost any scientific value and political acceptability. We cannot imagine, however, that to know that race is a myth will automatically eliminate racism.

The 19th century has justified oppressions and

discriminations associating race to biological notions : in Europe, large Jewish communities had to be different from the Christian majority, in the States, black minorities must be different from white population. In both cases, centuries of discrimination had to be rationalised, the oppressor had to be different from the oppressed. But, still in the 20th century, the distinction between racial and racist studies is weak: it is linked to the history of anthropology and is still present in debates regarding eugenism or heredity of intelligence.

The 19th and 20th centuries are accompanied by profound conceptual changes: during the 19th century, the progress of biology counteracted anthropocentrism and during the 20th century, the progresses of social anthropology counteracted ethnocentrism. "Is Man Unique?" is a question central to biological anthropology but at the basis of many false thinking. The biologist must answer that Man is indeed unique, as each animal species, and as a chimpanzee is not a gorilla and a dog is not a wolf. But, at the same time, the biologist must also ponderate these distinctive traits: we are answering to the same fundamental biological principles applied to all animal species, as all mammals and particularly as well as primates. With the chimpanzee, for instance, we have more than 99% genetical similarities.

Since Charles Darwin, the different species are considered different, without valuing one "better" than another. A hierarchy is not existing and Man is not at the top of a zoological hierarchy.

The myth of inequality of races belongs to a political vision coming back with the ideology of extreme right-wing and of ethnocentric nationalism. Hate for the others and egoism are giving credit to demagogues.

Biological anthropology, as well as social anthropology, has been used in different periods and in different contexts to justify the colonial exploitation, to support a nationalist ideology, to control indigenous populations and to support the exploitation of Man by Man. But anthropology can also serve to facilitate a system of education in a multiethnic context or to help intercultural relationships in a global market.

It can help justice, equality and human dignity. A correct position on racism is not to deny the differences between populations, which indeed exist, nor to deny the need of Man to identify himself with a group, but to state that the different groups of persons must have the same access to resources and that no group nor any individual should be

discriminated.

To be different is inherent to our human (and even animal) nature; to be different is not a sign of inequality, the largest part of variability being present within each population more than between populations. We are six billion of human beings, all different and all rich of these differences. Why should homogeneity bring us more happiness ? Tolerance is not only necessary in philosophical and cultural terms but must imply also the respect of biological differences.

KEYWORDS Racism. Demography. Migrant

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