

RACIAL HISTORIES AND THEIR REGIMES OF TRUTH

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...before World War II, before the rise of nazism, before the end of the great European empires...race was still largely seen in Europe and North America (and elsewhere as well) as an essence, a natural phenomenon, whose meaning was fixed, as constant as a southern star (Winant 1994, p. 13).

What is found at the historical beginning of things is not the inviolable identity of their origins; it is the dissension of other things. It is disparity (Foucault 1977, p. 142).

INTRODUCTION

This paper is an effort to identify how contemporary scholars write about the history of racisms and the assumptions about racial thinking that they bring to those histories. I am interested in the analytic “grids of intelligibility” that underwrite their narratives, thus not with that object identified as “racism” (how it has manifested itself in different time and place), but rather with scholarly accounts of its emergence, its datings and its unique and recurrent attributes. Nor is this primarily an attempt to locate those more “truthful” stories about

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racism from those which are not (though I suppose I harbor some subliminal hope that this is what I can do), but rather to first step back and identify some features of racism's contemporary anti-racist historiography.

I am interested in the "regimes of truth" that inform Euro-American accounts of racisms and the political investments that those of us who write those accounts have in them. By Foucault's definition these regimes are not "the ensemble of truths" but rather the "ensemble of rules according to which the true and the false are separated and specific effects of power [are] attached to the true" (Foucault 1980, pp. 131-131).¹ While still some way from identifying those "rules," the questions I pose push in that direction: what truth-claims inform our accounts, on what grounds do we take some accounts to be more credible and sensible than others, how do we imagine racisms to be secured, and what originary myths do we assign to them?

A hallmark feature of contemporary scholarship² is a willingness—some might say an insistence—to acknowledge that there is no single object called racism, but a plurality of racisms which are not rehearsals of one another but distinct systems of practice and belief. Within this frame, historically different meanings are attached to the concept of "race" and the racisms they entail. Recognition of plurality in part stems from the attribution of racisms' conditions of origin to different events and different contexts. What is more surprising are the number of features these varied accounts hold in common and that, in view of their disparate foci, would seem unlikely to recur. So a basic question: are these recurrences derived from the fact that these accounts share a common object, that is, racism, as we might expect, or rather from the common assumptions underlying the scholarship? Is there something to learn about the nature of racisms from discrepancies and commonalities in the stories we tell about them? Perhaps more troubling: are these anti-racist histories so much a part and product of racial discourse that they are, despite intention, subject to its regimes of truth?

To put it more directly, it strikes me that we have been far more reflective and attentive to how race and racisms have been defined and contrasted in past and present than we have been to the truth claims on which our assessments of definition and explanation are based. My interest is thus not in the founding myths of those invested in racial taxonomies at different historical moments (a subject to which anthropologists and historians have attended for sometime), but rather in the founding myths and preoccupations of those who study them. Thus I look at the conflicting stories that historians tell about the origins of racism (which one could—though I would not—write off to historical specificity), and at some of the recurrent conditions of possibility invoked in different accounts of origin. At a moment in which "meta" anything is considered wrong headed and a sure sign that one has fallen for an essentializing strategy, I want to think through a metahistory of racial discourse. Not one that stands above and outside history, but one that attends to the tensions and

givens in our historical narratives and how those narratives inform critical analysis of what is considered distinctive about racisms today.³

I start from a basic observation: that the profusion of historical research on the emergence of, what Omi and Winant aptly refer to as, "racial formations" has turned on specifying the changing political semantics of race and how the race concept has been mobilized differently in structuring specific racisms and their hierarchies of difference (Omi and Winant 1986). Focused on the social construction of racial taxonomies and their naturalization, some have sought to identify the convergence of racisms with specific labor regimes: with slavery, with expanding capitalism, or with the bureaucratic normalizing technologies of modern states. Some have identified racism not as an aberrant feature of, and exception to, the establishment of liberalism and democratic rights but as a founding principle of them.⁴ Others have argued that 1800 not the 1600s marks racism's emergence, identifying its critical articulation with nationalism and the ascendancy of bourgeois hegemony in its modern form (Mosse 1985). My interest is less in the "accuracy" of these different datings than in their plurality and why such a range is possible.

I offer several arguments; one, that some of the patterned ways in which contemporary racism is understood are predicated on flattened, reductive histories of what racisms once looked like, so that, two, when scholars distinguish between racisms of past and present, they often imply that racisms once existed in more overt and pristine form. Third, I take this "flattening" not to be arbitrary, but contingent on a basic and historically problematic contrast between a biologized, physiological and somatic racism of the past held up as fundamentally distinct from a more nuanced culturally coded and complex racism of the present. Four, I hold that this contrast is central to how "the new racism" is marked as a more "insidious," "silently sophisticated," "subtle" and therefore "novel" phenomenon.⁵ Finally, I suggest that this disposition towards the past rests on a scholarly quest for origins, for the "original" moment in which the dye of race was cast.⁶ That search in part shapes the particular forms that anti-racist histories of racisms take: sometimes written as narratives of "original sin," sometimes as narratives that describe innocuous cultural representations of difference "before the (racial) fall." In both cases, histories of racism often appear as narratives of redemption.

This quest for origins encourages certain kinds of scholarly efforts and not others: thus the abundance of histories that track the Portuguese, Spanish or French etymology of the word "race" and its first appearance, or those that trace the deep symbolic import of the color "black" and its biblical referents, its entrenchment in Western civilization. While such etymological exercises abound, less directly addressed are the epistemic principles on which the concept of "race" depends, that is, the ways of knowing, in which scholars participate and imagine racisms to rely.⁷

Sidestepping that question is curious on several counts, not least because histories of racism take on different form depending on how we figure racism's epistemic emphases. Some scholars take racism to be first and foremost a "visual ideology" where the visible and somatic confirms the "truth" of the self. Others lay emphasis on the fact that racial thinking historically has been predicated on using visual markers to index distinct hidden properties of different human kinds. While in some ways this observation is obvious, the consequences for how racisms are assumed to be secured are not.

If racisms always entail an interpretation of this relationship between the seen and the unseen, construed historically in however many different ways, then we who write those histories must reckon with the two ways of knowing implied. In one, the "truth" of race is understood as grounded in somatically observable, *dependable* differences; in the other, the "truth" of racial membership is not visually secured at all. Surface perceptions are unreliable and membership is dependent on privileged knowledge of "hidden properties" of human kinds, of those secreted in their depths.

What follows from these epistemic standpoints are different stories: racism is either so pervasive because difference is so palpable and "obvious," or lethal because it is not. Anti-racist histories may either expose the nineteenth-century fiction of somatic fixities or the fiction of non-visual essentialist ones. In both cases the target is racism's reliance on the artifice of fixed and immutable racial types. Both accounts turn on "proving" the porousness of race as a concept, and/or the permeability of racial categories. Both accounts confront, and are designed to debunk, the false stability of racial taxonomies on the premise that such an analytic assault undermines one of racism's foundational fictions and serves as an effective anti-racist strategy.

If the attack on immutability is one cornerstone of anti-racist histories, what I would call an "ocular obsession" is another. In the latter, the power of racisms resides in a visual "common sense" about human kinds. It is the power of the gaze on which racial knowledge is thought to build and on which its resiliency is seen to rest.⁸ No one would deny that racisms call on the visual, but visual "common sense" is not an historical constant. It has played a minor part in some folk and scientific theories of race, a more prominent one in others. In whichever version, however, such theories rarely, if ever, have been about somatics alone. What is striking about the nineteenth-century imperial fields in which racial discourses were honed and thrived is in some ways counter-intuitive to how we as scholars have construed the historical making of race and the part essentialism plays in it: racial memberships were based not only on a non-visible set of criteria, but on the assessment of a *changing* set of features that made up a racial essence. Among these changing properties were cultural competencies, moral civilities and affective sensibilities that were poorly secured by chromatic indices, and not by color-based taxonomies or visual markers.

Rather than choose between these approaches, we might do better to explore the disparity between the "seen" and the "unseen," the interpretive space such a tension provides and what it enables. One line of my argument should become clear: that the ambiguity of those sets of relationships between the somatic and the inner self, the phenotype and the genotype, pigment shade and psychological sensibility are not slips in, or obstacles to, racial thinking but rather conditions for its proliferation and possibility.

ORIGINARY MYTHS AND COMMON (SENSE) THEMES

Among the competing theories about when racisms emerge, and the commonalities that distinctively different and dissonant approaches to racism share, some are more obvious than others. I offer a number here not because they are comprehensive and definitively "right," but for more strategic reasons: (1) because these repetitions in explanation have been ignored; and (2) because their juxtaposition forces a troubling question: why does such *patterned* ambiguity pervade our historical narratives? Finally, I point to similarities in explanation to broach a more important observation: contrary renderings of racisms from varied time and place may not reveal the incompatibility of these accounts, but rather may reflect the "polyvalent mobility" of racial discourse and the tenacious significance of it.

Two striking features emerge in the historiography of racism by focusing on historians' narratives rather than on the history of the changing meanings of race: one is the wide range of different datings provided for racisms' moment of emergence, and the other, is the sheer quantity of different explanations offered for them. Just to provide some sense of this range, I list below in no particular order, nor with careful attention to disciplinary context, some examples.

Harry Bracken has argued that seventeenth century empiricism "and the rise of manipulative models of man" made it more possible to think about different species of humans and was "decisive" in racism's historical emergence (Bracken 1973). Cornel West underscores that the "idea of white supremacy" emerged out of the powers of a modern discourse to "produce and prohibit, develop and delimit forms of rationality, scientificity, and objectivity...which draw boundaries for the intelligibility, availability and legitimacy of certain ideas" (West 1982). Etienne Balibar has turned our attention to the fact that universalism and racism are more than "complementary" but rather "contraries affecting one another from the inside" (Balibar 1994, p. 199).

Collette Guillaumin's account of racism's origins focuses on the rise of individuality and some bounded notion of the "ownership of the self" that "gave rise to the legal expression of racial membership" (Guillaumin 1995). The decline of monarchy and destruction of the naturalized social hierarchies that

absolutism endorsed prompted the forging of new naturalized collectivities and new disciplines that could account for them. These new disciplines could give credence to the belief that group membership was organic, based on distinct somatic and psychological traits that differently (but still naturally) "carved nature at its joints." In a similar vein, John Rex attributes racist beliefs to the decline of a legal system upholding inequalities and the sanctions to back it. He posits "that the doctrine of equality of economic opportunity [of economic liberalism] and that of racial superiority and inferiority are complements of one another" (Rex 1980, p. 131).

George Mosse traces racism's "foundations" to "the Enlightenment"—as do many others—and to "the religious revival of the eighteenth century" (Mosse 1978, p. 3). For Uday Mehta racism is an exclusionary principle theoretically inherent in, and crucial to, the development of a liberal politics (Mehta 1990). By Zygmunt Bauman's account, extreme racism, modernity, bureaucratic culture, and the civilizing process are historically and organically bound (Bauman 1989). David Goldberg too cites race as "one of the central conceptual inventions of modernity," embodying the "liberal paradox" that as "modernity commits itself to progressive idealized principles of liberty, equality and fraternity...there is a multiplication of racial identities and the sets of exclusions they prompt and rationalize, *enable*, and sustain" (Goldberg 1994, p. 6; my emphasis). For Foucault, modern racism is a product of the normalizing rise of "biopower" and fundamental to the technology of *all* modern biopolitical states—be they capitalist, fascist or socialist ones.⁹ This is obviously not an exhaustive list but the point I want to make should be clear. How can the emergence/articulation/development of empiricism, universalism, capitalism, modernity, liberalism, the Enlightenment, state structure, and slavery, all account for the rise of racism?

In contrast to most myths of origin, and specifically in contrast to the originary tales of race, timing is specified, rather than persons or place. Racism is discussed as if its conditions of appearance and reception were contingent on the prior valorization of particular forms of erudite knowledge (as in Philip Curtin's distinction between the fact that "there has always been instant recognition of race" and "the full-blown pseudo-scientific racism" that emerged in the 1840s) and/or precipitated by paradigmatic and conjunctural shifts in the social organization of economic and political relations (the decline of absolutism, the rise of capitalism) (Curtin 1964, pp. 28-29). Racial "theory" in these accounts is thought to reside with those who truce in high science and high politics, by and large confined to those who do "theory" with a capital "T." But there is little agreement about which forms of knowledge and political organization are critical in the making of racisms and which are not. For liberalism, universalism and cultural relativism—while frequently seen as the culprits—rarely occupy the same explanatory ground. Sometimes they are treated as bodies of belief whose own conception gives rise to racism, other

times as conjectural moments that caused and consolidated racialized practices, and elsewhere as progressive political principles gone awry that may still, when righted, yield plausible strategies for racism's eradication.

What is at issue here? Either these scholars are not talking about the same phenomenon (the definitions of racism differ), or these are indeed complementary correlations, not causal connections. Or is it that the propensity to think in racial terms is a preserved possibility, activated, but not accounted for, by these historical sightings? (Hirschfeld 1996). Or is it something inherent to racism as a discursive formation that facilitates how it welds itself to such varied projects? There are other narrative themes that might help frame the questions we should address.

Related to these disparate accounts above is another equally compelling feature in racism's historiography: namely, how frequently different datings—from the seventeenth to the twentieth centuries—are cited as the moment of its "true" emergence. Whether that date coincides with the advent of slavery, as Barbara Fields suggests, or with the decline of it, as Thomas Holt deftly argues, whether with the emergence of modernity and liberalism or with the making of modern nation-states, what stands out is that in such different periods racism is characterized as "new" by those analyzing it (Fields 1982; Holt 1992).

One could argue that this observation is trivial on two counts: first, that a common definition of racism is not shared by many scholars, that they are not necessarily talking about the same thing. For some, racism is defined by evidence of prejudice, for some by the mere appearance of the concept "race," while others mark racism by its structural, institutional edifice, not by intent but by consequence. In short, one could counter that the datings differ because the phenomena in question are not the same. Alternately, one might dismiss the discrepancies with the argument that specific racial formations are shaped by specific relations of power and therefore have different histories and etymologies. These observations are plausible and certainly relevant if my task was to account only for the different datings, but it is not. I am as interested in the fact that racism so often *appears* as new to historians, as if each had discovered its uniquely originary moment.¹⁰

One could argue that the impulse to mark one's own period of historical expertise as a watershed is endemic to the parochial and noncomparative nature of much social and intellectual history, and therefore there should be nothing surprising about so many scholarly reinventions. But such cynicism seems unwarranted on at least one strong count: if racial discourses and practices can be vitalized and intensified with new relations of power, then it may be the configurations of power that are novel and how racism is inflected through them, rather than the fact of racism emerging "new" at these different times. But this "newness" of racism may be more than a case of scholarly misrecognition and mistaken identity. This appearance of newness may index

something more, something crucial to the ease with which racial discourse harnesses itself to reformist projects.

This points to another problem. If racisms so often appear new, they also appear as frequently *renewed* for the same contexts, if not for the same authors. As often as scholars recount the uniqueness of racism's invention, they remind us that these racisms can only be called "new" because there are earlier ones from which they emerged and of which they are a part (Bjorgo and Witte 1993). Thus even while the "newness" of racism is heralded, racisms are treated as systems of thinking and practice that build on primordial loyalties, that have deep and tenacious historical roots, that are vestiges of entrenched conflicts (as in Leon Poliakov's *Aryan Myth*), that tap atavistic psychological associations of color, contamination and pollution (as in Winthrop Jordan's repeatedly cited account in *White over Black*) that are readily available to service new social stratigraphies and classifications.¹¹

Rather than attempt to reconcile these contradictory claims, it may be more useful to take another tack: one which questions whether these competing claims are not evidence of a fundamental feature of the ways in which racial discourses work though sedimented and familiar cultural representations of difference as they simultaneously tap into and feed the emergence of new ones.¹² Thus the very "relevance" of racial distinctions, that which makes them speakable, common sense, comfortably incorporated and easily heard, may derive from the dense set of prior representations on which they build and in turn recast.¹³

Take, for example, the racially charged political debates about "mixed-bloods" in the Dutch East Indies in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. No historian of the Indies would suggest that the notion of "the mixed-blood" was invented in the late nineteenth century out of whole-cloth: "mestizos" were a problematic category for the East Indies Company in the seventeenth century, as was that colonial category labeled *inlandsche kinderen*, their proximate equivalent, in the mid 1800s. What is at issue here is not whether there was "mixing" earlier, but what kinds of people were created in the process of identifying some unions as "mixed" and therefore defining some people as part of the "mixed-blood problem" and not others.

By any contemporary criteria, the *métis* problem in Indochina and the "Indo" problem in the Indies were discourses of racial exclusion. But these debates were never about "inherited traits," physiological difference and phenotype alone, features that we often associate with racism in its nineteenth-century colonial fluorescence. These were nuanced discourses that called up pressing questions of national identity and anxieties over the "fit" between class location and racial membership in a colonial context in which European, white identity and middle-class respectability were not as homologous as some architects and practitioners of colonial rule hoped them to be (Stoler 1992).

But most importantly, the debates over the dangers of mixing and cultural hybridity called into creation a whole set of new technologies, progressive state

interventions, reformist gestures that appeared to have little to do with old prejudices, indeed with the past at all. Kindergartens and nursery schools were identified as progressive inventions of forward-looking liberal states, not tight-fisted racist ones (Stoler 1996).

In the Netherlands Indies, those urging these new institutions—doctors, schoolteachers, low-ranked civil servants and high level bureaucrats (those endowed with erudite knowledge and as many who were not)—participated in a racial discourse in very specific ways that stressed the effects of environmental contagions on human character and racial type more than they resorted to arguments based on biological immutability. Lamarckian notions of racial susceptibility—fears of sexual, moral and affective contamination of white children by native servants and native children—were readily available and easy to grasp. The point is that these racial discourses were both new and renewed, well-worn and innovative, protective of the past and geared to limiting the entitlements of specific populations in the future.

If racial discourses draw on the past as they harness themselves to new visions and projects, then at least one observation follows: by this reasoning, students of the history of racism should not expect consensus on whether they are witness to a legacy of the past or the emergence of a new phenomenon all together precisely because racial discourse operates in a mobile discursive field that at once contains and produces the two. As Foucault insisted in his 1976 Collège de France lectures on the subject, these are discourses of vacillations with dynamic motility. Racial discourses produce new truths and ruptures as they fold into and recuperate old ones.¹⁴

Foucault is certainly not alone in noting this mobile quality. Barbara Fields has called racism a "promiscuous critter" while George Mosse has underscored the "very broadness" of its claims (Fields 1982; Mosse 1978, p.xxvi). Ralph Ezekiel notes that U.S. racist movements "hitchhike" on other political programs (Ezekiel 1995, p. xxxii). David Goldberg goes further, holding that the concept of race is an "empty vacuum"—an image both conveying its "chameleonic" quality and ability to ingest other ways of distinguishing social categories and incorporating ostensibly competing ones (Goldberg 1993, p. 3). The issue of mobility is obviously worthy enough for a range of scholars to note, but none explore the particular properties of that mobility nor the more general consequences of that observation. For if Foucault is right that one of the defining features of racism is its "polyvalent mobility," that it may vacillate and be embraced by those opposed to and beleaguered by the state at one moment and become an integral part of the technologies of state rule at another, then the fact that racial discourses contain and coexist with a range of political agendas is not a contradiction but a fundamental historical feature of their *non-linear*, spiraling political genealogies.

Foucault offers something more. He signals attention not only to the fact of their mobility, but to one compelling reason for it; namely, that racial

discourses contain both “erudite” and “subjugated” knowledge, and thus genealogically build on the concerns of those privileged purveyors of truth, those with “erudite knowledge” as well as those whose knowledge has been disqualified or denied access to the realm of valorized knowledge.¹⁵ Or as he puts it more succinctly: racial discourse has not, as often assumed, always positioned itself as a narrative/history of those allied with state power, but at different historical moments as a *contre-histoire*—a “counter narrative/history” of those contesting the state’s legitimate claims to rule. Within his frame, historical accounts of racism matter very much for they are not outside racism’s relations of power but fundamental to their making.¹⁶ By Foucault’s account, racial discourse operates at different levels in the micromanagement of individual bodies and the macromanagement of the body politic. But as a discursive formation, its tactical qualities are more quixotic still, for it moves as easily between different political projects as it seizes upon *different* elements of earlier discourses reworked for new political ends.¹⁷

These features of mobility are useful to keep in mind when we look to another exemplary paradox in the historiography of racism: namely, the “comfortable” fit students of racism repeatedly find between racism and conservative political agendas. There is no denying that connection; however, it is striking how much less we have attended to the ways in which racial discourses can and do harness themselves with frequent success to progressive ones.

Not all students of racism’s histories limit themselves to racism’s conserving and conservative impulses and strategies. Decades ago, Edmund Morgan argued that American republican notions of freedom were forged by asserting the distinctions of race. David Roediger more recently has argued convincingly that a discourse on “whiteness” not only enabled working-class formation in the nineteenth century, but that working-class “assertions of white freedom” and struggles against capitalist disciplinary strategies were made in the language of race (Roediger 1991, p. 49).

Notwithstanding such exceptions, a common historiographic assumption is that racial discourse is a discourse of those with power (or those trying to maintain their hold) rather than a “dense transfer point of it;” more specifically, that the subjects of scholarly enquiry—racists—are ill-educated, close-minded conservatives, and/or ill-intentioned but well-heeled ones. As Pierre-Andre Taguieff argues, much of the anti-racist discourse in France posits racism as a pathological response of those labeled “racist” (thereby simply inverting the racist claims that the designated Other is “pathologically” oversexed and psychologically lazy), deflecting attention from the “well-meaning” larger society in which racism is widespread, nurtured and maintained.¹⁸ Racism is construed historically as a set of social practices embraced by reactionary members of a changing body politic. Even those who argue that liberalism gives rise to a racialized politics of exclusion often do so by arguing that racism is a *reactive* strategy, cemented by those upper or lower classes invested in

guarding themselves against incursions on their extensive privilege (i.e., the rich), or limited power (i.e., “poor whites”).

Paradoxically then, racism is treated as a set of power relations instigated by those who rule, but more fundamentally embraced in its more virulent forms by those who do not. Thus, there is another foundational fiction; racist excess, like sexual excess, is a result of the unbridled passions of ordinary folk, not those endowed with the civilities of well-educated white men.¹⁹

This view does more than shift effortlessly between the identification of individual and social pathologies. It prompts an analytic move that reappears in the historiography of racism of the seventeenth to the twentieth centuries. Namely, it associates racism’s emergence with “disorder,” whether it takes on social, moral, political or economic form. When strongly put, the causal arrow from “disorder” to racism is directly drawn. For example, Karen Newman attributes the racialized discourse in Shakespeare’s *Othello* not only to the fear of “masterless men” (of persons out of place) but to fears of the Other crescendoing in a moment of “challenges to traditional notions of order and degree” (Newman 1987, p. 47). Michael Banton draws on Winthrop Jordan to point to a seventeenth-century British society “in ferment,” to the preponderance again of “masterless men” who provoked anxieties about the “apparent dissolution of social and moral controls” (Banton 1977, p. 14; see also Jordan 1968). Hannah Arendt saw racialized accounts of the social order emerging with an aristocracy whose privileges were fast being encroached upon by an increasingly mobile and wealthy bourgeoisie: In her account, it was not the fear of “masterless men” but fear of a masterful bourgeoisie usurping both positions of power and what defined morality (Arendt 1948).²⁰ For the colonial context of the Dutch East Indies, I too have worked off the assumption that the intensification of racialized policies was a response to “crises of control,” to the colonial state’s fear that disorderly moral conduct was a form of political subversion (Stoler 1991). Recent analyses of the “new racism” turn on similar arguments: namely, that racism is a response to the social and economic disorders, dislocations and anonymities produced by postmodern capitalism, and responsive to a disjuncture between expectations and an attenuation of entitlements (Goldberg 1993, p. 70).

While all of these may accurately mark the particular moments that intensify racialized accounts, “disorder” in itself accounts for too little, and too much. More importantly, it is already a key term and justification for segregating and racialized policies and thus a tautology to suggest that it can account for that of which it is already a part. As Bauman argues, the image of the “conceptual Jew” in Nazi Germany as *visqueux* (slimy) represented not only boundary transgression but “chaos and devastation” (Bauman 1989, pp. 39–40). The demand for “order” and the normalization and/or elimination and expulsion of those who threatened it—what Foucault has called a “defense of society against itself,” and what Balibar calls a defense of a society’s “interior

frontiers"—is a leitmotif in the discourse of state racism, not an explanation of it.

ON THE TACTICAL MOBILITY OF RACIAL DISCOURSE

I frequently have used the term "discourse" here but should clarify that I do not intend it in the generic sense it is used in so much of what is labeled the "discursive turn" today. I want to stay closer to the analytic work I think Foucault did in defining what constitutes a "discursive formation." In fact, the pat gloss of "discourse" to designate a unified and coherent field of statements (as in the ubiquitous term "colonial discourse") ignores most of what Foucault had to say about discourse and is a pretty accurate description of what it is not. In *The Archaeology of Knowledge* he writes:

[A discursive formation is marked by] the different possibilities that it opens of reanimating already existing themes, of arousing opposed strategies, of giving way to irreconcilable interests, of making it possible, with a particular set of concepts, to play different games. Rather than seeking the permanence of themes, images and opinions through time, rather than retracing the dialectic of their conflicts in order to individualize groups of statements, could one not rather mark out the dispersion of the points of choice, and define prior to any options, to any thematic preference, a field of strategic possibilities? (Foucault 1972, pp. 36-37).

Could our current understanding of racism as a discursive formation be any further from this definition? Contemporary use fails to capture three crucial elements: (1) that it is mobile; (2) that it does *not* display constant or consistent political interests; and (3) that it lacks thematic unity. Viewed in this way, we should not expect the "racial discourse" of the Dutch in late nineteenth-century Java or among the LePenist constituency in turn of the twenty-first century France to reveal a common set of intentions, consequences, and/or themes. A discourse is racial not because it displays shared political interests but rather because it delineates a field and set of conditions in which it becomes impossible to talk about sexuality, class membership, morality, and childrearing without talking about race (Foucault 1972, p. 144).

This notion of "polyvalent mobility" pushes us to another apparent contradiction in racial discourse that has gone unaddressed. While much of the historiography of racism has focused on how modern racisms build upon, recruit, and take hold of old loyalties and pre-existing senses of commonality and difference in the service of new political projects, it pays less sustained attention to how racisms recuperate and invent past legacies that provide utopian visions of the future. At one level, this too is uncontroversial. Historians have discussed the social hygiene campaigns of the Nazi state and U.S. sterilization laws at the high moment of eugenics as programs forged in the spirit and language of a new social order. My point, however, is that racial

discourses, even in their more muted forms, are more broadly utopian and are not the futuristic fantasies of racist demagogues alone. Racism does not "dream of eternal contaminations...outside of history" as Ben Anderson once wrote, but rather promises to move society forward through a return to the past (Anderson 1983). Pat Robertson's "new world order" is a diagnostic of today's troubles and a blueprint for the future (Robertson 1991). LePen's National Front in France has not gained 30% of the votes in local elections only from skinheads and closet reactionaries. The current platform of the National Front is embraced precisely by those who see themselves as anti-elitist, anti-state, populist, and conservatively progressive (Taguieff 1990).²¹ The Front's most recent and successful slogan "Neither Right, nor Left, but French" captures the sophisticated tactical mobility of its claims (Joffrin 1995).

The nationalist and patriotic appropriations of racial discourse have been explored by students of racism for some time and I will not go into them here (see, e.g., Balibar 1994; Eley and Suny 1996). But one aspect of that relationship is relevant to note: much current analysis argues that racism today differs from earlier variants because it explicitly encourages those embracing its principles to see themselves not as racists, but as protectors of the national patrimony, as "true" and patriotic citizens of the United States, England, Germany, or France. Whether committed to individual rights, "the right to difference," or, as LePen urges, the "right to a national preference" accounts of contemporary racism note how easily a discourse of (individual) rights and rational behavior serves racial discourse, producing a political and psychological grid in which racial thinking, rationality and rights go hand in hand.²² In the "illiberal" politics of D'Souza, who contends that racism is dead and the discourse about it should be as well, the taxi-driver who passes three men of color to pick up one who is white is doing nothing racist, but acting on the basis of reasoned, rational choice (D'Souza 1995).

The observation that racists in the postmodern era are encouraged not to see themselves as such may capture something significant about how racial discourses operate today, but it again flattens history in the service of a spurious contrast; namely that earlier racisms did nothing of the sort, that those racisms were candidly embraced by their advocates. But this is a caricature of colonial racial sensibilities, not a description of them. Dutch colonials in Indonesia in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century were not alone in adamantly declaring that they did *not* subscribe to racism and emphatically did subscribe to the equality of human rights.

When we as scholars take such high profile racists as Gobineau, Madison Grant, and Vacher Lapouge as exemplars of racial reasoning, we miss the force field in which racial discourses have thrived. Focus on such extreme figures dissuades questioning the nuanced ways in which *homo europeus* was discursively constructed, culturally maintained and secured as much in sexual and domestic arrangements within the family as in public discourse outside it.

The point is important because a central tenet in analyses of the "new racism" is that it occupies a different and more intimate location than earlier racisms, "above all, in family life" (Gilroy 1987, p. 43). Paul Gilroy, for example, has argued that "families are therefore not only the nation in microcosm, its key components, but act as the means to turn social processes into natural, instinctive ones" (p. 43). But such assessments place subtle state interventions on the side of the post-colonial, and Manichean, blunt racisms on the other. When Gilroy states that "the new racism is primarily concerned with mechanisms of inclusion and exclusion," it should not be surprising that some students of colonial racisms are given pause (p. 45). Attention to the relationship between inclusions and exclusions are not new to contemporary racism but to the concerns and language of scholars studying them. Colonial racisms were explicitly preoccupied with the politics of exclusion, with the making of adults and children into racialized beings, with educating their racially cued comportments, moral sentiments and desires in ways that were invariably "about" bourgeois respectability, "civility," and culture and less explicitly "about" race.

What is more, this notion that being racist was once more acceptable than it is today feeds off a prevailing myth in stories of modern racism's origins; namely, that race was once a notion perceived as fixed and natural, in Winant's words, "as constant as a southern star." Thus even such an astute historian as Michael Adas contends that there was little racism in the field of colonial technology and science until the late nineteenth century on the grounds that the "notion [that] biological factors were responsible for Europe's achievement and global dominance was not [yet] widely argued" and that European colonials shared a belief in the "improvability" of Asian and African populations. Part of his "proof" is that "the connections between innate physical characteristics and moral or intellectual capabilities remained ill-defined even in the most systematic of the racist tracts" (Adas 1989, p. 274). Such a reading of racism assumes a developmental model in which racism only emerges as dominant when the linkages between the physical and psychological are definitively specified, scientifically validated and easy, if not to prove, at least to grasp.²³

Adas's account rests on a basic assumption of much anti-racist discourse of the post-war period: namely, that if we can disprove the credibility of race as a scientific concept, we can dismantle the power of racism itself—that racisms rise and fall on the scientific credibility of the concept of race. Not only can racisms thrive without such certainty, racial discourses proliferate and produce new relations of power and knowledge in the contest over which of these linkages are "true" or "false." Thus, for example, the fact that phrenology—the theory that a person's character and intelligence could be deduced from the shape of the skull—was quickly discredited in the nineteenth century as an accurate measure of racial endowment did nothing to undermine the discussion of, and attention riveted on, the relationship between physical

measurements and mental aptitude. On the contrary, phrenology provided a placeholder in which the search for a relationship between phenotype and genotype was not disqualified, but only its specific coordinates. What is important is that the search for a link could remain an active and reasonable quest in scientific and folk theories of race.

ON FIXITIES AND FLUIDITIES IN RACIAL DISCOURSE

The premise underwriting Adas' historical account, that nineteenth century racisms were first and foremost about biology, surfaces in analyses of racisms today: not that race was once ambiguous but that it was once a clear concept, and that past racisms were dependent on it. Contra that prevailing wisdom (of those such as Winant, by no means alone in making such a blanket claim), colonial concepts of "race" have had more the consistency and constancy of the Milky Way—perceptible boundaries from a distance but made up a moving constellation of parts of changing intensity—and less the fixity of a southern star. This adherence to a notion of fixity rests on the assumption that fixity was rooted in a commonly shared biological model of race, that some notion of "immutability" was crucial to it, and that race was a concept unproblematically conceived as "natural." But as George Stocking once noted, Lamarckian notions that acquired traits could be inheritable, and that human variation was responsive to environmental conditions were as much a part of nineteenth-century racial thinking and practice as those focused more squarely on the immutability and permanence of traits (Stocking 1968, pp. 234-269).

The problem does not necessarily rest with what sociologists of contemporary racism have carelessly culled from colonial histories, but rather, with what historians of colonialism have ingested from colonial discourses about who "has a race." In British, Dutch, and French colonial records, students of colonialism have tended to look more at the clarity with which the Other was marked than at the ambiguity by which membership in the categories of "white" and "European" were defined.

In the Netherlands Indies, it was not the certainty and assuredness of *homo europeus* that was debated but its fragile vulnerability. In a context in which "mixed-blooded" children of European fathers and Asian mothers occupied a thick corridor between colonizer and colonized, race could never be a matter of physiology alone. Cultural competency in Dutch customs, a sense of "belonging" in a Dutch cultural milieu, a "distance" and disaffiliation with things Javanese, as well as appropriate domestic arrangements, parenting styles and moral environment made up the ethnography of race. Each of these, to different degree, and with strategic priority, were crucial to defining in law and everyday practice who was to have access to what privileges and who was to be considered European (Stoler 1992, 1996).

I have made this argument elsewhere and only repeat it here to underscore that the porousness we assign to the contemporary concept of race may be a fluidity fundamental to the concept itself and not a hallmark of our postmodern moment. Histories of racisms that narrate a shift from the fixed and biological to the cultural and fluid impose a progression that poorly characterizes what racisms looked like in the nineteenth century and therefore have little to say about what distinguishes racisms today. Donald Kinder and Lynn Sander's claim in their new book *Divided by Color* (1996), that there is a new form of racial prejudice in the United States less concerned with genes than with "moral character" is only accurate if we imagine that earlier racisms were built solely on genotypes and physiologies. Racist perceptions and policies founded on the notion that the racialized Other is somehow "behaving badly" or "undeserving" of poor relief, too indolent to work, indeed "spoiled" by the charity of state aid has a very long political genealogy.

The complex legal machinations and political strategies by which racial membership has been redefined and realigned in any number of historical contexts—from the nineteenth-century Dutch East Indies and French Indochina, to twentieth-century South Africa, Latin America, and the United States—, should alert us to the fact that nineteenth-century racism was not built on the sure-footed classifications of science but on a potent set of cultural and affective criteria whose malleability was a key to the flexible scale along which economic privileges could be cordoned off and social entitlements reassigned. Racial taxonomies that included Japanese and Chinese as "European" at one colonial moment and not another, that placed children, regardless of color, who were acknowledged by their father in the category of European while excluding those fair-skinned children who were not, suggests that race is a "moving" and resilient category in strategic, non-incidental, ways.

This is not to suggest that notions of "fixity" do not underwrite racial logics. My point is that the current emphasis on the fluidity we now observe in the making of racial categories may not be the trenchant postcolonial critique we take it to be. It merely signals our somewhat belated recognition that the force of racial discourse is precisely in the double-vision it allows, in the fact that it combines notions of fixity and fluidity in ways that are basic to its dynamic.²⁴ That we who study the history of racism are so committed to documenting fluidity may have more to do with the sorts of political narratives of renunciation and thus of redemption we are intent to tell.²⁵ The "proof" that racial categories are fluid and not fixed confirms our political convictions that they can and should be undone.

This also raises another issue: if racial discourse embraces fixity and fluidity and this oscillation is partly where racisms' resiliency lies, then the new histories that we write and how we write them (my own "metahistory" of that writing included) too must reckon with the political field in which both notions are

strategically invoked for scholarly argument. In alternately claiming that we can know racism either by how race is visually marked or invisibly secured, we are positioned in racial formations as participant-observers.

Thus even one of the more subtle commentators on contemporary racism in France, Pierre-Andre Taguieff, takes the immutability of human kinds as a defining feature of racist thinking, both in its nineteenth-century biologized context and in the context of the European community's strong anti-immigrant stance at the moment. By his account, French anti-racism's fierce defense of a "right to difference" is grounded in a cultural relativism derived from the very principles of the racisms against which it is aimed. The critique is fair enough, and is currently being made by many others.²⁶ But taking "immutability" as the hallmark of racism does not explain much since it never was, nor is now, a necessary and sufficient condition for those invested in a racist logic. Architects of Dutch colonial rule insisted that the racial Other had knowable and fixed traits. But how they thought about racial identity was not dependent on that notion. They were far more hesitant in insisting what definitive set of attributes secured their own racial membership, and thus what permanent characteristics held for themselves. The notion of "immutability" may play off deep cognitive beliefs that people have about what constitutes human kinds, but, ironically, it only becomes a potent political principle when the attributes designated as immutable are pliable and plastic in ways that allow redefinitions at the boundaries of categories that themselves remain resilient over time.²⁷

The Euro-American racial discourse around "contamination" is one exemplary site to locate the confused sensibilities and dual ways of knowing on which folk and scientific theories of racial membership depend. Theories of racial contamination invariably have been asymmetric in how fixity was assigned. Contagions in the Dutch Indies, for example, were discussed in popular and scholarly literatures as if they moved easily from native to European, but not the other way around. Thus, notions of racial contagion rested on two competing truth claims: (1) on the premise of discrete categories of people and, (2) on the premise that those allegedly discrete categories could be irremediably "sullied" through sexual, moral and affective contact and fundamentally transformed. Whether the category is fixed but membership in it is not, or the category is altered by subtractions and supplements of members on its margins, "contamination" as a cultural and political notion simultaneously does two kinds of work: it both confirms *and* calls into question the discreteness of human kinds.

This does not undermine the notion that essentialist thinking and practices are operative. Rather it suggests that essentialisms are not secured by fixed traits but by substitutable and interchangeable sets of them. Basic to nineteenth-century European discourses on racial essence was an explicit debate about where that immutable essence was located, a disquiet about its vulnerability

but rarely a belief in no essence at all. Essentialist thinking may rest not on a psychological commitment to permanence, but rather on the fact that those attributes that make it up have moving and fungible parts.

RACIAL EPISTEMOLOGIES

Although the relationship between knowledge production and racism has been a well-researched subject for some time, there is another sense in which I want to pursue it here. While we know that racial theories have built on, and engendered a range of "scientific" subdisciplines—from Lamarckianism to Social Darwinism, eugenics, degeneracy theory, phrenology, anthropology, philology, and social psychology to name a few—we have not really questioned the ways of knowing on which racisms depend.

I have argued here that we need to attend to a more complicated epistemic field. The force of racisms is not found in the alleged fixity of visual knowledge, nor on essentialism itself, but on the *malleability* of the criteria of psychological dispositions and moral sensibilities that the visual could neither definitively secure nor explain. In considering that a critical feature of racial discourse may be its "polyvalent mobility," I am not suggesting that racism is everywhere and nowhere, arbitrarily allied, infinitely adaptable or, in David Goldberg's words, an "empty vacuum." I am more interested in exploring the ways in which racisms take on the form of other things, wrap themselves around heated issues, descend upon political pulse points, appear as reasoned judgments, beyond sentiment, as they penetrate impassioned bodies.

In turning to inconsistencies and disparities in debates that ostensibly were not about race at all, we may better capture the specific ways in which that mobility was realized and the consequences of it. It is neither somatics nor essentialism that give racisms their force. It is rather the always ambiguous relationship between the two and the interpretive space that ambiguity affords that confers on racial discourse its dynamic motility. A notion of essence does not necessarily rest on immovable parts but on the strategic inclusion of different attributes, of a changing constellation of features and a changing weighing of them. Racial discourses do seem to have some patterned ways—some "southern stars"—by which they lodge themselves in different historical moments and define power relations between groups: our accounts of those histories do so as well. The question is whether those "stars" to which we ascribe certainty in accounting for racisms past and present, and those "stars" that provide for the continuing significance and salience of racisms are yet shared.

One way to bring racisms' histories and our accounts of those histories into better line is to attend closer to the disparities in both our stories of origin and in the range of attributes by which we consider racisms should be defined. Instead of reconciling these discrepancies, I take them as telling signs. The

tension between fluidity and fixity in racial discourse, between the seen and the unseen, between the appearance of racisms as always "new" and "renewed" at the same time, may signal something powerful about the force field in which such discourses thrive.

In that force field, the histories of racisms we write fold back into a field of radicalized practices that make up a broader set of racial genealogies. These racisms are transformed not only by the different moments in which they are instantiated—suggesting that racisms, like nationalisms, may have modular features. Our scholarly interpretations of those instantiations themselves become preserved possibilities providing these discourses of power with new inspirations and new locations that may nourish their expansive, polysemic and contingent qualities.

By calling into question how we write histories of racism and in suggesting that our accounts often read as narratives of redemption, I am not suggesting that we give up on the task of writing racisms' counter histories, but rather that we attend more carefully to the politics that underwrite why we tell the historical stories we do and to the epistemic principles to which we subscribe. It is more histories of the present we need—not less—to appreciate what political investments have made histories of racism in the post civil rights 1970s look so different from (and sometimes similar to) histories of racism in the multicultural 1980s, and from histories of racism written under the spectre of the New Right's sophisticated cultural politics that so fiercely denies that racism—and therefore any antiracist effort—matters today.

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NOTES

1. While this notion underwrites my arguments, this paper is only a first step in that direction. Here I deal more with the assumptions that appear in histories of racism and less fully with the political investments in those specific truth-claims (Foucault 1980, pp. 131-132).
2. Whenever I refer to "this scholarship," I am specifically referring to accounts produced largely by academics trained in Euro-American theoretical and methodological traditions. I do not claim that all histories of racism can be characterized by the features I outline here, but that the convergences and contradictions I identify do dominate much of the contemporary Euro-American historical field.
3. By "metahistory" I do not mean the full range of "poetic," narrative styles in historiography that Hayden White invokes with the use of that term, but rather some of the common and contradictory elements that go into contemporary histories of racism as well as those analyses of contemporary racist practice that build on those received historical accounts.
4. See Morgan (1979), West (1982), Roediger (1991), and Holt (1992) for close historical examinations of this process. In a similar but more general philosophical vein, also see Mehta (1990) and Goldberg (1993) for a synthetic treatment of the relationship between racism and modernity.
5. For the starkest examples of this position, that is, that contemporary racism is distinguished by its strong cultural coding, see Taguieff (1990a) and Gilroy (1987) who writes:

It will be argued that [the new racism's] novelty lies in the capacity to link discourses of patriotism, nationalism, xenophobia, Englishness, Britishness, militarism and gender difference into a complex system which gives 'race' its contemporary meaning (p. 43).
6. My critique of the search for racism's origins is directly inspired by Foucault (1977).
7. Appreciative of Rorty's warning that obsession with epistemology is, as Paul Rabinow puts it, "an accidental but eventually sterile turning in Western culture," it nevertheless seems to me that one of the most crucial questions we can ask of any system of domination is about the cultural logic that underwrites how people convince themselves that they know what they know. Construed in this way, epistemological questions are not the "last word," but eminently and always cultural and political ones. See Rabinow's discussion of Rorty on epistemology.
8. On the non-visual features of racial thinking see Stoler (1995) and Hirschfeld's (1996) cognitive account.
9. On the relationship between state racism and biopower see Foucault's (1991) final 1976 Collège de France lecture and my discussion of it (Stoler 1995, pp. 80-88).
10. While such a quest for origins clearly is not specific to histories of racism—and is ubiquitous in the ways in which Euro-American religious and secular scholarly traditions have made credible the "facts" on which truth claims are based—what is striking is how committed critics of racism remain to such originary quests and what political investments we might have in them.
11. For the most frequently invoked account of this sort, to which numerous subsequent histories of racism refer, see Jordan (1968).
12. On "dominant, residual and emergent" features of cultural systems see Williams (1977, pp. 121-127).
13. On theories of relevance see Sperber and Wilson (1986).
14. See my discussion of these lectures (Stoler 1995, pp. 62-94). Only three of the 1976 Collège de France lectures have been published (the first two in English, the final one in French). While the first two have been available in English for sometime (see Foucault 1980), they have never been treated in the context of the corpus of which they are a part, that is, as the introductory lectures to the seminar Foucault devoted specifically to "the origins of modern racism."

15. Some students of racism's histories refer to racial discourse's "imperialistic" qualities in the sense that it may be taken up by, and take over the content of, other constructions of difference like that of caste in India where the contemporary debate on caste is so often framed in racial terms (see Dumont 1963). Thus in noting racism's "tactical mobility" at issue is not only that it can harness to different projects within Europe, but as importantly, that it can be harnessed by other social movements to validate and substantiate the importance of their claims. On the hazards of so doing, see Anthony Appiah's (1992) discussion of the negritude movement in Africa that, he argues, not only "begins with the assumption of the racial solidarity of the Negro" but that "racism...could only be countered by accepting the categories of race" (p. 6).
16. For Foucault's discussion of racial discourse as a *contre-histoire*, see Stoler (1995, pp. 68-69, 73-80).
17. One could argue that all potent political symbols ("equality," "freedom," "individual rights," "social justice") are necessarily polyvalent, endowed with amorphous qualities that guarantee their resilience over space, context and time, properties ensuring that their potency will not be lost in local translation. One important difference between these very abstract concepts and that of race is the ways in which the latter descends into any particularity, not as a superimposition that can later be unpeeled, not as a general principle diluted in a specific context, but rather as a discourse that takes on the shape of other social distinctions with an almost miasmic quality.
18. As Taguieff writes:

[anti-racism works off the premise that] racism only exists among "racists," patently, labeled, declared or recognized as such in public space. Situated, localised, identified in the singular figure of the political "barbarian" of the late 20th century, racism thus can be combatted in the same way one fights against organized groups menacing the public order: i.e., through police repression and by judicial sanction. Prohibit and dissolve (p.xi).
- Racism as an attribute of individual and/or social pathology has a long genealogy. Most early psychological work on racism, certainly Adorno et al. (19xx), tried to mark it as the pathological outcome of a dysfunctional childhood.
19. In colonial documents and the analyses of colonial racism derived from them, poor, "decivilised" whites are targeted as both the most ardent supporters of racism and subversive of it. In addition, it is white women whose jealous passions and confinement in narrow-minded milieus bring racism to the colonies. For an analysis of the colonial debates and historical commentaries on this issue see Stoler (1989, 1991). On the "unbridled passions" of subaltern European men, see Stoler (1995, pp. 179-180). Note that both colonial assessments and the historiography on the rise of racism converge on the similar point that "the problem" of intensified racism was related to the sexual appetites of subaltern European men. In a similar vein, Feagin and Vera (1995, p. 116), note that racial violence may be perpetrated by "less-educated whites," but the conditions for it are managed by the white middle class.
20. On others who make a similar analyses see Stoler (1995, pp. 77-78).
21. Also see Robertson (1991), where his populist stance against class elites is insistent and clear.
22. See, for example, Stanley Fish's (1995), Op-ed piece on racism and individual rights. Many defenders of affirmative action attempt to counter the current assault on it by pointing to the ways in which a discourse of individual rights is invoked to support a retreat from government support for affirmative action.
23. Adas' account is sensitive to the fact that "race" had a wide range of ambiguous meanings; nevertheless, a fixed notion of *racism*, not race, remains untouched by that observation.
24. My use of "double-vision" here is not to be confused with the sense in which DuBois used that term at the turn of the century.

25. On the politics of sentiment on which liberal empathy builds, see Ellison (1996).
26. Among others who look at cultural relativism from a spectrum of progressive and conservative political positions, see D'Souza (1995) for whom liberal cultural relativism, not racism, is the culprit and cause of social tensions and inequities today. Compare di Leonardo (1996) where as she so well puts it, "The diatribe against 'cultural relativism' is an extraordinary one-stop shop for a bricolage of New Right causes" (p. 26). Why both such a strong critic of the French National Front as Taguieff and a new conservative like D'Souza should target cultural relativism is striking (and is it incidental that both come up with similar book titles, *Les Fins du Anti-Racisme* [playing on the "goals" and the "end" of antiracism] and *The End of Racism*?). That "cultural relativism" historically has served and continues to serve as a target of both anti-racist and racist discourse may exemplify what Foucault saw as the paradoxical genealogies in which racial discourse oscillates between history and *contre-histoire*.
27. For a discussion of the fact that to say "race is enduring" is *not* to say that "race is permanent" (or fixed) see Hirschfeld (1996, pp. 51-53).

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IMPLICATIONS:

A COMMENTARY ON STOLER

Virginia R. Domínguez

That intentions may be "invisible," or that they may clash with how scholarly work is consumed, or that they may undermine recurrent and constitutive aspects of "racism" matter less to Stoler, in my reading of this paper, than why the work is done and what assumptions it unintentionally holds constant. I take Ann Stoler to be most interested in scholars' political investments especially when they write about race within a self-naming "progressive" agenda. The issues she raises are issues of implication, in all senses of the word: what is implied (and by whom), what is implicated (and who is implicated), and what results (and with what consequences for whom).

INTENTIONS

Ann Stoler has always been gutsy and this is no exception. Committed to the idea that intellectual work should not shy away from tough issues, she can be relentless in her own pursuit of social criticism and critical reflection and perhaps paradoxically truth. This paper, she says, "is an effort to identify how

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contemporary scholars write about the history of racisms and the assumptions about racial thinking that they bring to those histories." Admittedly a valid statement, it fails to capture the strongly critical intentions of the paper. She is, in fact, offering a serious critique and not a simple and descriptive survey of historical narratives of racisms. She comes closer to "the truth" when she states that she is "more interested in exploring the ways in which racisms take on the form of other things, wrap themselves around heated issues, descend upon political pulse points, appear as reasoned judgments, beyond sentiment, as they penetrate impassioned bodies" (p. 200).

It is clear that we who write histories of race, racialism, and racism are both her target and her audience. Criticism is accompanied by advocacy here, and the mixture can be confusing. She decries "narratives of redemption" (p. 201) but calls for "more histories of the present...not less" (p. 201). This, she argues, is a way to explore, stress, and

appreciate ... political investments [that] have made histories of racism in the post civil rights 1970s look so different from (and sometimes similar to) histories of racism...[that celebrate] multiculturalism in the 1980s, and ... histories of racism written under the specter of the New Right's sophisticated cultural politics that so fiercely denies that racism—and therefore any antiracist effort—matters today (p. 201).

Part of her argument is historiographic and, as she would say, "a metahistory of racial discourse" (p. 184). Although she argues effectively that her "interest is less in the 'accuracy' of ... different datings than in their plurality and why such a range is possible" (p. 185), Stoler is indeed interested in historiographic patterns both as data and as fields in which she seeks to make an intervention. Note the evaluative turn of phrase when she writes, "that some of the patterned ways in which contemporary racism is understood are predicated on *flattened, reductive* histories..." (p. 185, emphasis added). Clearly Stoler wants different kinds of histories written.

But part of her argument is political-epistemological. There is something she wants more than some changes in the kinds of historical narratives of race and racism that are written. The driving force in this essay is clearly her desire to make all of us who write critically about racism increase our awareness of the "political investments we might have in them" (p. 188). It is the point she returns to often both in the text itself and in the footnotes (see, e.g., note 8). Many, perhaps most, histories of racism(s), according to Stoler, are motivated by a desire to fight racism, but get blinded by their common belief that racism and conservative political agendas go hand in hand. Slowly and mostly gently she shows her cards. It is the racism perpetuated—unintentionally one presumes—by "progressive" intellectuals that she has set out to identify and tackle. "It is striking," we find her saying, "how much less we have attended to the ways in which racial discourses can and do harness themselves with frequent success to progressive ones" (p. 192).

As I see it, there are at least four different scholarly choices that scholarly critics of racism and racial inequalities make, and I am undecided as to whether Stoler is taking aim at all of them. There are clearly those who publish openly critical descriptions of systems of inequality they identify as examples of racism. There are those who write histories of the ideas and institutions that twentieth-century Americans have come to identify with racism. There are those who research notions of race and color comparatively across more or less contemporary societies. And there are those who actively write about places and people that twentieth-century Americans typically process as racial others in the terms the people themselves use, the debates they have, and the relevance or irrelevance of our notions of race to their discourses of subjectification.

What I think all these scholarly moves have in common is an abhorrence for systems of inequality and oppression that invoke race, naturalize race, and legitimate themselves through a notion of race. They aim to call into question key premises and naturalized presumptions on which such systems rest. The openly critical descriptions may aim to shock readers by reporting mortality figures, the incidence of outright physical violence, the statutory regulations that structure and legitimate stratification based on race, and the health, education, income, and employment demographics that accompany such systems. Their openly hard-hitting criticism makes them unambiguous but also subject to charges that they are political tracts rather than scholarly analyses. Ann Stoler does not really dwell on this type of writing, and I wonder if it is because they are not subtle, or because the other types of anti-racist scholarly moves carry more cultural capital in the contemporary American intellectual world or, alternatively, because it is not particularly challenging or engaging to explore the assumptions about racial thinking that they bring to their writing.

Stoler definitely does take on those who critique racial systems by writing histories of racism(s). Her analysis of an apparent and common obsession with points of origin is strong, and her implication that they are misguided in their obsession is clear. As a non-historian, I do wonder why she considers it so important—and troubling. I do not exactly find most of that literature intent on justifying or legitimating systems of inequality and oppression that invoke race as their principle of differentiation. On the contrary, whether the argument is about which century or decade a particular contemporary element of "racism" first appeared or whether there is something significantly new about "racism" in the late twentieth century, the bottom line still seems to be the condemnation of these forms of inequality and oppression we identify with racism.

Ann Stoler also questions at least some of the assumptions about racial thinking that she finds in comparative studies of race and racism in the latter half of her paper. She clearly calls into question the liberatory possibilities of disputing claims to racial fixity or binarism through research documenting other societies' racial principles of differentiation and categorization. Implied

is the charge that there is a naïveté or a form of wishful thinking that gets in the way of these scholarly interventions—interventions that may presuppose that knowledge of the particular modalities and distinctions of any one racial system can help undermine the entire epistemological, ontological, emotive, and institutional complex on which “racial” systems of inequality and oppression rest.

Stoler has a point, but I wonder if her implication that these works have the potential to be more harmful than helpful is justified. Clearly if and when Brazilian, Cuban, Mexican, or Jamaican politicians, intellectual elites, industrial capitalists, or revolutionary cohorts downplay enduring forms of discrimination based on color or race in their countries by relying on scholarship that shows them to have less binary or more fluid racial or color categories than in the United States, they are not actively participating in a critique of their countries’ own form of “racial” discrimination. Ann Stoler’s implication that they may prove counterproductive clearly has some merit, but I suspect that scholarly efforts to document less binary and less rigid racial systems of classification are primarily works aimed at undermining U.K. and U.S. forms of racism in the twentieth century and may be far more effective, especially in the classroom, as anti-racist interventions in these two contexts than Stoler gives them credit for.

It is far less clear where Stoler stands vis-à-vis the fourth type of scholarship I consider often motivated by a real desire to counter racism, namely scholarship that rejects Anglo-American terminologies, interpretive grids, and narratives in favor of more home-grown ones in various regions or countries of the world. She makes reference to her colleague Nick Dirks’s work on the history, politics, and discursive practices surrounding India’s caste system and what he considers to be the inappropriate and misleading translation of the caste system as a racial system. But this is not really the kind of scholarship she highlights in this paper. Much of mid- and late twentieth-century U.S. social/cultural anthropology could be seen as falling in this category—work insisting on local explanations, cultural systems, historically developed social systems with varying degrees of functional integration, and active, even resistant, creative human beings who do not just think, feel, and act like “us.” To the extent that culturalism in U.S. anthropology has sought to counter racism and racialism, it too has created a kind of anti-racist intervention whose own premises and presumptions would seem to warrant scrutiny of a sort not present in Stoler’s current paper.

If then Stoler’s project in this article is, in fact, limited to two types of anti-racist scholarly works, it is just as interesting to think about which ones she puts under the microscope and which she fails to scrutinize, or chooses to omit from this paper. The explanation for what she does and does not take up cannot be simply disciplinary. Anthropologists, sociologists, and historians are cited and critiqued in Stoler’s essay, and some historians do blatant and direct

critiques of racism along with some social anthropologists, sociologists, and political scientists. Likewise, there are historians and sociologists as well as anthropologists among those producing local and area studies in local/regional terms outside the United States and the United Kingdom. But there does appear to be an abundance of historical writing cited and actively critiqued in what Ann Stoler scrutinizes here.

Is historicism, hence, Stoler’s real target, that is, the tendency to subject everything to an analysis of historical process and then to privilege such a narrative as the best type of scholarly explanation? Is it the very idea of historicity that is highlighted here for commentary and correction? Given Stoler’s own historiographic orientation, especially in her books and other articles, it would be most interesting if she were indeed targeting the usefulness of historicity for scholarly analysis of major social problems such as systematic recurrent inequality and oppression. That would mean that she was pulling the rug from under much of her own work—getting ready, one would presume, to seek new and different grounds on which to stand as a scholar. Nothing in this paper, after all, suggests the kind of radical position toward intellectual work that would see scholarship as simply ineffectual and at best virtual forms of political interventions.

INVESTMENTS

Two sections of the paper avowedly take on what she calls “the tactical mobility of racial discourse” (pp. 194-197) and the “fixities and fluidities in racial discourse” (pp. 197-200). They are arguably subarguments—even separate arguments—engaging with the content of debates in the field of critical race studies more than writing their metahistory, that is, arguing very much within the field (of critical, historically-inflected studies of racism) more than about it. But it is clear that Stoler is invested in making a different and more powerful argument.

One can certainly ask if it is really necessary to argue that “polyvalent mobility” is a critical feature of racial discourse in order to make the point that “our scholarly interpretations of [the] instantiations [of racisms]...[can provide] these discourses of power with [the possibility of] new inspirations and new locations” (p. 201). To put it in more direct terms, it is not hard to envision an argument about the potential contra-authorial uses and interpretations of a piece of scholarly analysis. Such a point does not require the proponent of such an argument to explore any of the possible features of the subject matter in question. But so significant a portion of Ann Stoler’s paper is devoted to these substantive points of referential stability and instability that we must conclude that she takes her overall argument to *hinge* on her analysis of particular characteristics of racial discourse and our unintentional scholarly complicity with it.

Part of me wishes she had just talked directly about scholarly complicity and proceeded to give us examples of the ways we can be shown to be complicitous, since I believe she would agree with this reading of her paper. I am aware that this reading and apparent preference must stem, in part, from interventions I have been making along these lines in recent years—with regard to intellectuals' participation in the way Israeli (Jewish) society has been imagined, constructed, and institutionalized (Domínguez 1989, 1993); the hyperprivileging of minority intellectuals in the United States (Domínguez 1994); the baggage of "race" in U.S. multicultural-talk (Domínguez 1995); and the ghettoizing of particular fields of knowledge such as "area-studies" and of non-U.S. scholars in many humanities and social science disciplines (e.g., Desmond and Domínguez 1996). But I do think that there is a great deal in Stoler's paper that resonates with my arguments about intellectual complicity.

I am convinced, for example, that she would welcome any one of us exploring "the analytic 'grids of intelligibility' that [may] underwrite our narratives" (p. 183) for signs of complicity with racialism and racism, no matter how unintentional. As I look at myself in Ann Stoler's eyes, for instance, I get a glimpse of how I might be implicated. Like Stoler, I find myself frequently doing extensive archival work, insisting on historicity, and writing chronologically inflected narratives of the idea of race, the modalities of racial inequality, and the technologies of racial boundedness (see, e.g., Domínguez 1986, 1995). I certainly think it is worthwhile asking why.

At a working conference on "Race, Power and the Mind" organized by the Cognition/Culture Program at the University of Michigan in February 1996 (and at which Ann Stoler presented an earlier version of her paper published in this volume), I found myself thinking about my own goals and motivations as I prepared myself to introduce the paper "Life with and without Race." Armed with documentary, archival, and legal data in both Hawaiian and English, that paper traced the history of how an Anglo-American notion of race was introduced in Hawaii, how foreign a concept nineteenth-century Hawaiians found it, and how it became institutionalized and transformed over the past century, under American rule, making it one of the modes of self-definition available to Hawaiian activists even as they argue for sovereignty. I am quite convinced that this is a documentable case of the *introduction*, not the *transformation*, of the concept of race and the story of its appearance, imposition, institutionalization, and partial internalization is rich and interesting in its own right.

But I found myself trying to imagine a professionally mixed audience processing my paper, specifically an audience in which about half of the participants were psychologists from various subfields of psychology, psychologists who have devoted their life work to the psychology of prejudice, the psychology of race, the psychology of self-esteem, and black

psychology. Not only were the majority of the conference's participants working on black-white constructs of race (making Hawaii seem quite beside the point), but many of them also worked on black-white experiences and perceptions of race, with little or no use for an argument detailing how "race" came to be race at some point in the past and elsewhere on the globe. Traveling in professional circles that rarely include psychologists, I had the odd realization that they could easily process my paper as fascinating but irrelevant. This was not a matter of assigning blame but, rather, of realizing that my goals in that work could not be shared by those for whom my basic premises were invisible. I realized that it was not obvious to everyone that there could be something instrumental in finding a society with the documentation showing that "race" was introduced and not always somehow there. I realized that historical work linking a specific history of "race" with the rise of a particular mode of domination could be treated as interesting historical background, even treated as material through which to come to an understanding of what we mean when we say the social construction of race—but effectively just as interesting background. Most significantly, I realized that what I wanted them all to get was that this data, its analysis, and its presentation had contemporary political value in fighting racism—and not just in Hawaii. Why, then, I asked myself in public did I think this type of data important in fighting racism? Making my own interventionist motivations visible helped this very interdisciplinary audience imagine different, possible ways to consume its otherwise distant, historical data.

But these "outing" exercises are themselves complicated and often complicitous. I remember in the late 1980s reading an extended review article of my book *White By Definition: Social Classification in Creole Louisiana* (1986), and dwelling more on one point the author, John Kirkpatrick, made than on the expansive, generally supportive, and engaging thrust of his article. Kirkpatrick suggested that I might well have special stakes in the Louisiana case, given my own looks and the fact that as Cuban in the United States my racial identity might be something other than what I will, think, or grew up with in Cuba. He noted critically that I did not, in fact, write about it, but he failed to note that at that point in the 1980s, very few scholars were customarily discussing their subject positions each time they published. Although I saw some merit in his point, I remember mostly thinking that it read like a rhetorical move whereby *my* analysis was being bracketed as more suspect than, say, an American Jewish colleague's or an Irish American colleague's or a presumably all American WASP colleague's analysis precisely because he thought I might have a political investment in the work on Louisiana Creoles. The implication was that I might have it, not that we all have it, and that I was, hence, at fault for not coming clean about it.

IMPLICATIONS

Reproducing disempowerment among intellectuals by selectively assigning stakes to some of us and not to others is not Ann Stoler's game. Although she does not actually cite *White By Definition* (Dominguez 1986), I do feel implicated when she calls into question arguable presumptions of scholarly work that insists on writing about non-binary racial systems either outside North America or prior to the twentieth century even in North America. Clearly these are still race systems and we do not necessarily get very far by just adding them to our repository of knowledge. As a participant in such scholarly work, I, of course, want to deny that my work and that of many others who have contributed such work is simply additive; it leads me to wonder if Ann Stoler has not oversimplified and undervalued such work in articulating her large point. But I do not feel singled out by Ann Stoler's critique because of my Cuban birth, my Mediterranean looks, my privileged but exiled family's status, and (non-Cuban) American presumptions about Cubanness or contemporary minoritizing practices. I am just as interested in what David Roediger, Michael Omi, Howard Winant, Ruth Frankenberg, David Goldberg, Catherine Hall, and Ann Stoler are politically invested in as I am in what Paul Gilroy, Frank Snowden, Anthony Appiah, and Patricia Williams are up to. And so is Stoler.

The question is ultimately one of the potential benefits of what she wants and whether hers is not also a desire for liberation. What happens if we were all to accept her argument and heighten our awareness of our liberal or radical forms of complicity with "racisms"? It is unclear what kind of scholarship would or could or should emerge or toward what end. Do we now, or would we then, really need more histories of racism(s)? Is she really asking for less history and more contemporary analysis of race-inflected policies, practices, rhetorics? Isn't the analysis of other places and other times one of the ways we continue to fuel our anti-racist interventions in the scholarly arena?

Stoler's critique inspires a measured kind of hope because she believes that political interventions on behalf of anti-racism are both worthwhile and possible. But the hopefulness carries with it a sense of conviction and commitment and desire for change not all that different from what she finds in the histories of racism(s) that she critiques as narratives of redemption. In the larger scheme of things, I think I would rather have the conviction, commitment, and desire for change so many anti-racist scholars (including Ann Stoler) have than sink into an altogether easy, and perhaps appropriate, cynicism about the possibility of structural and cultural change. What Stoler suggests, and I believe we must seriously contemplate, is that authorial intention and even collective self-labeling as progressive, liberal, radical, or anti-racist cannot suffice.

While I, therefore, value her critical insistence on greater political self-awareness among anti-racist scholars and her desire to have this be public and

discussible, I think her implied hopefulness should not be forgotten. In the heat of internal debate, it is crucial to remind ourselves of what we do share with each other and what Ann Stoler wants—which is ultimately to be more openly and effectively political through our scholarship, rather than less.

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A RESPONSE TO STOLER

David Roediger

Professor Stoler's "Racial Histories and Their Regimes of Truth" shares many of the virtues which have made her writings on sexuality, race, and power in colonial Asia so subtle and influential. Stoler asks hard and unexpected questions, ranges widely but lingers over telling detail and seeks to write with clarity on difficult matters. The concern to specify, for example, how she is using "regimes of truth" and "discourse" makes "Racial Histories" far more accessible than much writing sharing its approach and language. (Her focused definition, p. 194, of what specifically constitutes a "racial discourse" is especially useful.) Nonetheless, this is, for a mere historian, a paper whose various dimensions will not be easily mastered and one which intervenes into debates not fully fathomed. Indeed it may be that (more than is usually the case) readers will interpret the argument in several ways, pointing to varied strengths, differences, absences and ways in which the analysis might lead. I therefore raise several matters for discussion and elaboration modestly, knowing that in some cases the paper likely contains more on the issues I identify than I have gotten from it.

The very first paragraph of "Racial Histories" sets out a firm distinction between "that object identified as 'racism' [and] scholarly accounts of its emergence." Stoler claims, in the present work, that her interests lie in the latter

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and not the former. Aside from wondering about the implications of casting racism as an "object," I doubted on first reading the possibility of keeping "racism" and "racism's contemporary anti-racist historiography" separate and trusted that Stoler would not succeed in doing so. Happily, she does seem to me to fail in this unbalancing act. Although the weight of the paper is on what can very broadly and usefully be called historiography, Stoler's strongest argument is that racism is itself in fact "polyvalently mobile" and has not been without its "inessentialist" culturalist dynamics, past or present. While some of these points emerge directly from a consideration of the historiography, the historical past of racism (as well as the question of what its origins are) remains very much an issue here. When Stoler characterizes contemporary scholars as "flattening" their accounts of racism's dynamics, she judges their work not against other possible regimes of truth but against her understanding of racism. Her criticism of Paul Gilroy rests in large part on the question of what "colonial racisms were explicitly preoccupied with." Near her conclusion, Stoler's goal is "to bring racisms' histories and our account of those histories into better line." Such a goal may be as in keeping with revisionist historiography as it is with inquiry into "regimes of truth," or it may be that the latter inquiry must often include some elements of revisionism.

On the specific issue of whether "neo-racism" is actually new, Stoler makes a neglected and critical point in declaiming against the idea of a modern biological racism being counterposed to a postmodern culturalist one. On both sides this distinction collapses. The bestselling popularity of *The Bell Curve* signals as much for our era, and the earlier evidence is perhaps even more plentiful. In the U.S. context, the president, reformer, historian of race, racist, and imperialist Theodore Roosevelt best illustrates Stoler's point. Friendly to eugenicists, obsessed with racial "stock" (a corporatist as well as agricultural allusion), and terrified of "race suicide," Roosevelt also maintained a neo-Lamarckian optimism that the "American race" could absorb new racial elements, including allegedly less-advanced European races, and could even gain energy from mixture if the proportions and conditions were right. Israel Zangwill's "The Melting Pot" was dedicated to Roosevelt, a great admirer of the play and of the concept, but not therefore obliged to give up his racism. I am less persuaded by Stoler's arguments against characterizing recent racism as particularly encouraging "those embracing its principles to see themselves not as racists," although her reminders of earlier Dutch colonial examples are apposite.

Stoler also usefully emphasizes the danger of assuming "that if we can disprove the credibility of race as a scientific concept, we can dismantle the power of racism itself." She also suggests that some efforts to historicize race fall victim to such facile evocations of a quick and flattened construction of racial ideologies as a flipside to overly vague political hopes for the easy deconstruction of race. I have written similarly (in *Toward the Abolition of*

Whiteness), warning of the need to go beyond the invocation of social constructionism in antiracist scholarship. But beyond Adas's work, it seems difficult to see how this particular criticism specifically applies to most of the specific historical scholarship here being critiqued. Whatever the merit of Stoler's other criticisms of them, Gilroy and Michael Omi and Howard Winant seem part of a trend to show that racism can thrive without fixed moorings in biology.

I further wished that Stoler would have done more toward specifying just what was at issue politically in the historiography she describes. Early on she declares a desire to explore the "political investments" of those scholars she discusses, and of her own work. And her conclusion is evocative as to which recent political moments in the history of racism she sees as decisive. But in between I could see what political stakes were involved only episodically and in a quite general way. In her treatment of the "origins debate," for example, I wished that there was more explicit reference to Marxism and to liberal appropriations of some Marxist positions. In the United States, to a remarkable and largely unnoticed extent, recent scholarship on the origins of racism, especially among the subaltern, is decisively inspired by Marxism (Alexander Saxton, Theodore Allen, Noel Ignatiev, Barbara Fields, George Lipsitz, and myself, for example) and is often fully willing to connect scholarship to politics. Furthermore, critique of the neoliberal project of vote-catching by moving "beyond race" must be very much on the minds of scholars like Steven Steinberg, Herbert Hill, and Adolph Reed when they write about racism's past. How does it matter that we locate the origins of racism in the rise of capitalism? In conquest and dispossession? In slavery? In slave-trading? In ruling class maneuvers? In the mass practice of terror? All these formulations have tremendously important political implications, though by no means uncontestedly simple ones. If the various emphases take shape within a single regime of truth, they may nonetheless justify digression to concretize what is meant by "political investment." Similarly, I longed for more explicit discussion of the tensions between scholarship placing racism's origins and reproduction within the context of global imperialism and that emphasizing slavery and other social inequalities in the Americas and, often specifically, in the United States.

Stoler's paper also raises a very large issue which has lately much occupied my attention, without satisfactory results. This is the question of how historiographies of race can cope with the changes in the popular, scientific and legal usage of the term over time. My own recent research, with James Barrett, set out to detail how Southern and Eastern European immigrants in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries learned about race in the United States. But increasingly we came to realize that the issue of how these immigrants were themselves racially categorized was equally salient. Since the contemporary literature so insisted on a "Slavic race" and a "Latin race" and at other times on races based on nationality and yet again on racial distinctions

even between Italians, the contemporary view of a neat white/nonwhite binary in the United States could hardly structure our historical analysis of race, unless we were willing to fall back on the odd but prevalent contention that a century ago people just didn't know how to use the term. In many ways we ended concentrating unwittingly on race's historical polyvalences.

But at the same time, African Americans and Asian Americans, for example, were clearly "raced" differently than Finns, Poles, or French Canadian immigrants. Although our study ended in 1924, we were certainly aware that Eastern and Southern European immigrants to the United States, whom we characterized as racially "in-between" people, became white within decades and that their whitening was both a result and a cause of changing definitions of race. Perhaps inevitably and without doubt flatteningly, we looked for clues in the pre-1924 period illuminating what would happen after 1924. Knowing the outcome surely closed off avenues into discussion of many polyvalences present in the early twentieth century, but it also positioned us to speak to questions of concern to us and to many readers.

Finally, the emphasis on polyvalences in Stoler's paper offers an opportunity to say word about racism's other great "-valence," its ambivalence. In the work of George Rawick, especially in his remarkable reflections on race, slavery and capitalism at the conclusion of *From Sundown to Sunup*, in Eric Lott's fine study of *Love and Theft* as central elements of the racism of the minstrel stage, in James Baldwin's brilliant discussion of racism as hatred of the other and of other parts of the racist's self, the abiding ambivalence of racism eloquently structures analysis. Whether this emphasis represents oversimplification of a much more multidetermined phenomenon, or (as I tend to think) one key to overcoming the flatness of histories of race, is well worth discussion, though perhaps not in this provocative paper by Stoler, which already does many things and does them well.

FOR AN ANALYTIC OF RACIAL DOMINATION

Loïc J.D. Wacquant

Objectivation and subjectivation are not independent from each other; it is from their mutual development and reciprocal ties that are born what we could call "games of truth," that is, the discovery not of true things but of the rules whereby what a subject can say concerning certain things pertains to the question of truth and falsehood.

—Michel Foucault

Language sets everyone the same traps; it is an immense network of easily accessible wrong turnings.

—Ludwig Wittgenstein

In "Racial Histories and their Regimes of Truth," Ann Laura Stoler raises, frontally or obliquely, many of the core issues that simultaneously occupy and occlude the study of these elusive, contentious, yet seemingly omnipresent phenomena we have come to subsume under the category of "race"¹ and its derivatives. In this comment, which cannot do full justice to the breadth and subtleness of her argument, I concentrate on three problems that she points to (or illustrates) in her attempt to outline "a meta-history of racial discourse." I offer a different diagnosis for the quandaries of the contemporary sociology

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of "race" and then sketch an alternative approach to resolving the "patterned ambiguity that pervade our historical narratives [of] racism" (p. 187).

First, I argue that many of the problematic features of sociohistorical inquiries of "racisms" she identifies can be traced to the continual *barter between folk and analytical notions*, the uncontrolled conflation of social and sociological understandings of "race." Second, I propose that the persistent "quest for origins" betrays the tenacious hold of the *logic of the trial* which impells investigators to seek out victims and culprits rather than identify mechanisms. Third, I contend that, much as we stand to gain from the kind of conceptual reflexivity that Stoler advocates, we must not let ourselves get entangled in the twists and turns of racial-racist² discourse: we must *go beyond discourse* to elucidate the varied forms assumed by racial(ized) practices and institutions as well as the concrete ways in which these interlock to form specific regimes of racial domination. Which implies forsaking once and for all the inflammatory and exceedingly ductile category of "racism," save as a descriptive term referring to empirically analyzable doctrines and beliefs about "race."

Lastly, and consequently, rather than a new *rhetoric* of (and on) racial discourse, meta or not, I suggest that we need to develop an *analytic of racial domination*, that is, a conceptual apparatus capable of helping us differentiate, unhinge, and reassemble the diverse forms that relations of racial subordination assume in different times and places. And if we are to take our cues from Foucault to do this, we should turn not to the early Foucault of *The Archeology of Knowledge*, but to the later Foucault of *Discipline and Punish* and *The Care of Self*. It is not his theory of discourse and even "biopower" but his notions of discipline and technology of the self that promise to be useful in this task. Not *épistémè* but *gouvernementalité* should be our orienting conceptual compass.

THE DEMARCATION PROBLEM

Ann Laura Stoler opens her examination of the working epistemology of racial studies by asking: "On what grounds do we take some accounts as more credible and sensible than others?" (p. 184). The quick and dirty answer is: by relying on the ethnoracial common sense that we share with other members of society—the "big society" of our nation-state and the "little society" of scholars, to recall a dyad dear to Tocqueville. For, with precious few exceptions, students of "race" have *accepted lay preconstructions* of the phenomenon. They have been content to tackle "race" in the manner in which it has been constituted as a "social problem" in reality itself. Worse yet: they have taken over as tools of analysis the reified products of the ethnoracial struggles of the past. In short, they have failed to establish a clear demarcation between folk and analytic understandings of "race."

Now, this confusion is intrinsic to the category. From its inception, the collective fiction labeled "race," namely, that humanity is composed of bounded

groupings between whom *social* differences are the product of *physical* differences (visible or not) and are thus liable to be explained by (overt or covert) reference to *biology* rather than *history*, this fiction has always mixed science with common sense and traded on the complicity between them.³ When in 1758 Carolus Linnaeus formalized the distinction between the four canonical "races" of the four continents (America, Europe, Asia, Africa), based on the four natural elements (air, earth, fire, water) and corresponding to the four corners of the world (north, south, east, west) as well as to the four humors of the body (blood, phlegm, yellow bile, black bile), he was both codifying an extensive array of ordinary premodern perceptions and partaking of a scientific revolution that for the first time was posing the question of how to fit together human diversity and hierarchy.⁴ The rise of science, eventually supplanting the Church as a paramount symbolic power, did not wash out folk notions; it retranslated and reworked them within a new discursive frame.⁵ This dubious commerce has gone on uninterrupted ever since so that countless presociological conceptions of "race" survive, indeed thrive, in contemporary lay and scientific thought.

The result of this ongoing traffic between folk and analytical concepts is that *the history of racial domination is inscribed in the scientific unconscious of our disciplines* and acts as a powerful censoring mechanism upon all researchers, including those who do not ostensibly study "race."⁶ This is visible in the categories we use, namely, the scientifically inept but socially powerful differentiation between "race" and "ethnicity;" in how we organize our inquiries by reference to groups as they appear in the official taxonomies of the state; and in the structure of each national social scientific field, wherein "race" is alternately dissolved under another rubric, coupled with germane issues, or set apart for special examination. Contrast, by way of mental experimentation, the century-old existence in the United States of a separate subfield of "race relations" carefully insulated from political sociology and from class analysis, and, more recently, the proliferation of ethnically-based domains of inquiry (African-American, Asian-American, Latino, etc.), with the traditions of "folklore" in South Africa, "community" studies in Great Britain and "immigration" in France.⁷ How could the concept of "race" not be porous when it contains and conveys all of the ambiguities, instabilities, and contradictions of folk taxonomies and of the manifold (and oft untold) histories of classification struggles?

Social scientists have not only accepted a preconstructed object; they have also elevated *one particular national preconstruction* of "race," that evolved by the United States in the twentieth century, as the basic yardstick by which to measure all instances of ethnoracial subordination and inequality. Like it or not, the sociology of "race" all over the world is dominated by U.S. scholarship. And since U.S. scholarship itself is suffused with U.S. folk conceptions of "race," the peculiar schema of racial division developed by one

country during a small segment of its short history, a schema unusual for its degree of arbitrariness, rigidity and social consequentiality, has been virtually universalized as the template through which analyses of "race" in all countries and epochs are to be conducted.⁸

As a result, "histories of racism that narrate a shift from the fixed and biological to the cultural and fluid" do not merely "impose a progression" that mischaracterizes the racisms of the past (p. 198). They also wash out cross-cultural variations in the sociosymbolic foundations and logic of racial domination. The idea that "race" is a matter of "physiology alone" bespeaks the hegemony of U.S. folk notions premised on an obsessive concern with descent and blood admixture (rather than "color:" persons with some African ancestry are socially categorized as "black" in the United States even when they have light skin and so-called Caucasian features). In a germinal yet nearly forgotten article published thirty years ago, Charles Wagley showed that "social race in the Americas" admits of several definitions that assign differential weights to ancestry, physical appearance (itself not limited to skin tone), and sociocultural status (encompassing occupation, income, education, community membership, dress, manners, and self-identification), depending on the trajectory of group heritage, incorporation, and conflict (Wagley 1965). Only in the United States is "race" defined solely on the basis of descent and then, strictly so only in the case of African-Americans.

We should not underestimate the power of common sense to insinuate itself into the most sophisticated and self-conscious analysis of "race." Proof is, even Stoler surreptitiously appeals to our ordinary understandings of "racism" when she gives as an example of the "tactical mobility" of racial discourses the rise of LePen on the French political scene (p. 195). What is it exactly in the propaganda of the National Front that qualifies it as "racist," as distinct from xenophobic and populist, given that membership in the French national compact has been defined by political affiliation and not descent for two centuries? We are not told. Mostly, of course, because it would take us too far afield from the paper's main argument, but note how the gap is smoothly and silently filled by the reader: "Everyone knows LePen is a racist." Doxic acquiescence, not analytical explication, is the basis of agreement.

The fact that "racial discourses contain both 'erudite' and 'subjugated' knowledge" (pp. 191-192), and this since their origins, does not dictate that the conceptual arsenal of the sociologist of racial division admit and perpetuate such promiscuity. "Race" cannot be both object and tool of analysis, *explanandum* and *explanans*. Here it is urgent to reaffirm Durkheim's first rule of the sociological method—the need to break with prenotions—and to challenge the unreflective use of "race" as an explanatory principle when it is backed by little more than national common sense.¹¹

THE LOGIC OF THE TRIAL

Because it smuggles its basic categories and problems in from everyday experience, the sociology of "race" has been mired in what I call *the logic of the trial*: the will to convict or exonerate this or that society, institution, or group, for or from the terrible sin of "racism." In this respect also, histories of racism partake of the same "regime of truth" as their object, notwithstanding (or because of) the noble intentions of their authors: they entail constructing a moral scale along which different human categories may be rank-ordered and through which responsibility is ultimately assigned. If so many accounts of racial division take the form of "narratives of 'original sin,'" as Stoler intimates, it is because they obey this logic, which serves mainly to reaffirm the goodness of the investigator (and readers).¹¹ Historical inquiry is thereby harnessed to a collective enterprise of intellectual expiation whereby the stain of racial subjugation is symbolically cleansed off from the academic body. The problem is that such atonement does little to help us get closer to the phenomenon at hand and penetrate its makeup, quite the contrary.

Consider, for instance, how the brunt of recent research on racial inequality in Brazil—much of it carried out by Americans and by Latin Americans trained in the United States—aims at demonstrating that, contrary to its national self-understanding, the land of "the three sad races" is really a "racist" society and that "white" Brazilians are just as prejudiced as white Americans (and perhaps more so, *racismo mascarado* being more devious than open discrimination and rigid segregation). Instead of probing the constitution of the local racial order in its own terms, the Brazilian myth of "racial democracy" is replaced wholesale by the reassuring panracialist myth according to which all societies are "racist," including those where "race relations" seem on first look less distant and hostile. "Flattened histories of racisms" (p. 185) thus find their counterpart in flattened comparisons that defeat their own purpose in that they collapse the different dimensions and modalities of racial domination onto a one-dimensional judgmental grid, obscuring crucial differences in the bases, forms, and implications of racial division.¹²

Because it obeys the logic of the trial, the sociology of "race" is overwhelmingly *group-oriented rather than problem-oriented*. It concentrates on documenting the trajectory, condition, and experiences of one or several social groups, in keeping with the urge to show how this or that category was/is oppressed, suppressed, and/or actively engaged in valiant resistance. In so doing, it typically takes for granted the existence of these groups as such and misses the dynamic process whereby they were fabricated at the cost of a complex work of *group-making* that inscribed ethnoracial boundaries in the objectivity of social space and in the subjectivity of mental space.

This same proclivity likewise restricts attention to *inter-racial* relations at the expense of *intra-racial* differentiations, to the near-total exclusion of the

study of racial(ized) practices, beliefs, and institutions *among* subordinate categories.¹³ This thwarts an adequate understanding of the differential impact of racial imposition upon the collective psychology of the dominated and of the suffusive sociological ambivalence characteristic of the position and dispositions of intermediate groupings. It is as if revealing that subjugated categories also have their own ethnoracial distinctions would tarnish them and blunt the critique of racial domination. This tendency is particularly pronounced today due to the reviviscence of populist epistemologies that accord on principle a privileged cognitive status to the putative concerns and viewpoints of the subordinate.

The logic of the trial is premised in good part on the accepted wisdom that "racism" is *in toto* the product of Western colonial expansion manufactured by "whites" to inferiorize "people of color."¹⁴ This is not the place to subject this oddly Eurocentric view to a systematic critique except to note that it does not square with three facts that an adequate theory of racial domination must eventually encompass. The first is that, though the history of "race" correlates closely with that of Western imperialism, it is neither fully coterminous with, nor reducible to, the latter. Colonial expansion accelerated and amplified the impulse to categorize on putative biological grounds but it neither initiated nor ever wholly contained it. Second, "racism" is not targeted solely at "people of color" (unless one defines as such any collective that comes to be racialized, but then we enter the province of tautology). The first groups to be "racialized" by Europe were not colonized populations but the "Others from the Interior": Jews, peasants, workers, rival and recalcitrant nationalities within nascent states, and this well before the bloom of imperialism.¹⁵

The third fact anomalous with the straightforward equation of "racism" with Western colonialism is the existence of long-standing racial traditions in non-Western societies. To take but one instance, a rich syncretic tradition of racial thinking played an integral role in the formation of national consciousness and society in modern China.¹⁶ Mixing homegrown Confucian categories (rooted in the dualism between a civilized center and a "barbarian" periphery) with Western concepts of physical type, this tradition portrayed the Han Chinese as a distinct biological grouping descended from the mythical Yellow Emperor. It anchored a rigid vision of a planetary racial hierarchy featuring "yellow" and "white" at the top and "black, red, and brown" at the bottom and it made eugenics into a preeminent instrument of national revival from the overthrown of the Manchu dynasty in 1911 until racial discourse was officially banned by the new Communist regime.¹⁷

All these reasons make it urgent to reassert that *to conduct sociological analysis is not to conduct a trial*. The purpose of sociohistorical investigation is not to establish guilt and to affix blame for unpalatable social facts but to break those down into their constituent components so as to uncover the social and symbolic mechanisms that produce, reproduce, or transform them over

time and across space. Its end-purpose is to *explain and understand*, not to excoriate or exculpate, denigrate or celebrate. In his well-known 1904 essay on "Objectivity in Social Science and Social Policy," Max Weber writes:

There is, and always will be, an unbridgeable distinction among (1) those arguments which appeal to our capacity to become enthusiastic and our feeling for concrete practical aims or cultural forms and values, (2) those arguments in which, once it is a question of the validity of ethical norms, the appeal is directed to our conscience, and finally (3) those arguments that appeal to our capacity and need for *analytically ordering* empirical reality in a manner which lays claim to *validity* as empirical truth (Weber 1949, p. 58).

In our moment marked by the profusion of strains of epistemological subjectivism and irrationalism (often self-designated by the name of "postmodernism"), it is particularly important to reaffirm the analytical imperative.

BEYOND DISCOURSE

Turning our conceptual tools back onto the very operations whereby knowledge of "race" is produced, packaged, and disseminated can help bolster and meet that analytical imperative and, by the same token, lower the emotional and ethical tenor of the sociology of racial orders. But as we attend to the "complicated epistemological field" that "racism" both feeds and draws upon (p. 199), we must beware of the solipsistic reduction of "racism" to discourses of "race". The problem here is not with Foucault's theory of discursive formations. One may grant that "in every society, the production of discourse is at once controlled, selected, organized, and reallocated by a set number of procedures whose role is to conjure up discourse's powers and dangers, to master its aleatory actualization, to elide it burdensome, redoubtable, materiality" and that racism, like other discourses, is subject to "external procedures" of exclusion and "internal procedures" of rarefaction and appropriation (Foucault 1971, p. 11) that account for its polymorphism and its peculiar alloying of fixity and mobility. The problem is with the built-in *limitations of the notion of discourse* and its application to society and history.

Notwithstanding pronouncements to the contrary by our self-appointed prophets of postmodernity, social reality is not a text and "race" is not (only) a "system of dispersion of utterances"—one of Foucault's many, shifting, definitions of discourse. In point of fact, it is precisely because it does not live merely in and through discourse that "race" has proven so resilient, pervasive, and slippery. Wherever it becomes an operative principle of social vision and division, "race" resides in the full gamut of forms assumed by social action: in categories, taxonomies, and theories, but also in the objective distributions of positions and powers that make up institutions and, last but not least, in

human bodies shaped and inhabited by the differentiations it stipulates. "Race" is a fiction that has been made real by a protracted historical work of construction of social space and mental space that has established a complicity between similarly configured things and minds, objectified history and embodied history (Bourdieu 1980, 1989, forthcoming).¹⁸

Because it overlooks non-discursive practices and institutions, "Racial Histories and their Regimes of Truth" suffers from the tendency—typical of structuralist accounts, including those that disguise themselves in the terminology of poststructuralism—to autonomize discourse and to endow it with the capacity to "act" on its own impulses, that is, to produce a reality conforming to itself. Consider how, in Stoler's text, racial "discourses harness themselves to new visions and projects," "seize upon different elements of earlier discourses," "recuperate and invent past legacies," and "produce new relations of power and knowledge" seemingly by themselves (pp. 191, 192, 194, 196). The "epistemic principles" that underwrite our histories of "racism," what we may call our *racial épistémè*, threaten to mutate into a racial *deus ex machina* that moves thinkers, writers, and ordinary persons alike as so much human scrap metal in a magnetic force field and whose invisible agency may be invoked at will to explain any aspect of historical reality. When discourses become actors of the historical stage, social analysis is prone to lapse into functionalist argumentation, albeit of a non-teleological kind (Brenner 1994).

But the conditions of possibility that make up an *épistémè* do not guarantee its effectiveness. Just as the "conditions of felicity" of performative utterances are institutional factors residing outside of language, discourses do not contain within themselves the social mechanisms that endow them with potency. The most limiting assumption of Stoler's research program, then, is that we can elucidate "racism" by scanning and probing its discourse, as if some transparent, stable, and immediately elucidable connection obtained between discursive instantiations of "race" and the systems of concrete practices and organizations through which it materializes itself.

Drawing on a different aspect of Foucault's protean work might help us avoid this impasse. Much as Saussure warned against abusive extrapolation from language to other social institutions, Michel Foucault came, in his "post-epistemological" period, to recognize that the study of discourse cannot be the *alpha* and the *omega* of a history of the present: "The history which bears and determines us has the form of a war rather than that of language: *relations of power, not relations of meaning*," determine what we are and who we become. In a retrospective presentation of his work published in 1984 under an assumed name in which he puts forth the definition of "games of truth" featured above as epigram, Foucault (1980, p. 114, 1994) is more explicit still: It is "practices," understood both as a mode of being and as a mode of thinking, that give us the key to the intelligibility of the correlative constitution of the subject and the object.

If "race" is a manner of dividing and ranking human beings by reference to selected embodied properties (real or imputed) so as to subordinate, exclude, and exploit them, then we must study those *practices of division* and the institutions that both buttress and result from them. We have to elucidate the varying forms and mechanisms of racial "government" in the "broad sense of techniques and procedures aimed at directing the conduct of persons" (Foucault 1989, p. 123) in a manner such that the collective fiction of racial separation is actualized. Thus it is not racial discourse but this "whole set of new technologies" that Stoler mentions only in passing (p. 190) that should stand at the epicenter of our examination of the constitution (in the active sense of setting up) of the racial order.

FORSAKING RACISM: TOWARD AN ANALYTIC OF RACIAL DOMINATION

We cannot rely on the category of racism to apprehend the modalities whereby the conjoint "objectification" and "subjectification" of "race" are effected. When it first came into currency in the 1930s, "racism" had a fairly precise meaning: a doctrine of racial superiority and the pseudo-scientific theories invoked to support it (which Stephen Jay Gould neatly encapsulates as "biological determinism"). But since this initial formulation, the term has undergone unchecked *conceptual inflation*,¹⁹ followed, in recent years, by accelerating *semantic decomposition*, to the point where it has ceased playing a useful analytical and even political role.

In contemporary scholarship, "racism" is employed indiscriminately to stand for individual bias and affect, collective beliefs and representations, images and discourses, patterns of behavior and modes of interaction, organizational outcomes and spatial settings, group ideologies and state policies, and even entire macrosystems of ethnoracial inequality and control. In Stoler's paper, racism designates in turn a "discursive formation," knowledges and beliefs, a "set of social practices," and an ensemble of "power relations." These uses confound questions of intent, cause, and consequence; they collapse levels of analysis; and they invite continued conflation of the cognitive, conative, and moral dimensions of "race."²⁰

A similar degeneration of the notion of "racism" has occurred in social and political life. In Brazil, Afro-Brazilian activists who strive to put color discrimination on the public agenda are accused of being racist by "white" and non-white Brazilians wishing to uphold the national tradition of "prejudice against prejudice." In the United States, proponents and opponents of affirmative action hurl the same epithets at each other and quote from the same writings by Martin Luther King to justify their opposite stances. In France, public housing officials seeking to avert the concentration of foreigners in

certain buildings were recently convicted of discrimination by the courts just as human rights organizations praised them for thereby fighting racism. Everywhere the rhetoric of anti-racism is being turned back upon its advocates by defenders of the ethnoracial status quo and of a return to a mythical "original" stage of ethnoracial homogeneity.

Far from resolving the pestering problem of racism's elusive referent(s), pluralizing the notion, as Stoler does in the wake of Paul Gilroy and others, only compounds the difficulty since it multiplies possible "wrong turnings" and increases the risk of analytical slippage. To "acknowledge that there is no single object but a plurality of racisms" (p. 184) presupposes that the category of racism retains a minimal coherence when that is no longer the case. Wittgenstein advises in his *Vermischte Bemerkungen* that "sometimes an expression has to be withdrawn from language and sent for cleaning" (Wittgenstein 1977, p. 39). Such is the case today with racism: the time has come to retire it from the armamentarium of the social sciences.

In place of the inchoate and overly malleable category of racism, I propose that we skirt issues of origins and abandon the search for a single overarching concept to develop an analytic of racial domination, that is, a parsimonious set of categories designed to anatomize the diverse manners in which ethnoracial government is exercised. I submit that any racial situation, structure, or event, may be broken down into a complex and dynamic concatenation of five *elementary forms of racial domination* that are the building blocks out of which the walls of ethnoracial division are made. Spanning the spectrum of social forms from cognition and interaction to space and institutions, these are: categorization (including classification, prejudice, and stigma), discrimination (differential treatment based on imputed group membership), segregation (group separation in physical and social space), ghettoization (the forced development of parallel social and organizational structures), and racial violence (ranging from interpersonal intimidation and aggression, to lynching, riots and pogroms, and climaxing with racial war and extermination).

These basic mechanisms of *ethnoracial subordination* enter into mobile combinations in different societies and during different periods within the same society so that at any point each group is confronted with a particular profile of *racial domination*. These profiles in turn tend to get locked into systems of racial ruling endowed with their own internal coherence, logic, and inertia.²¹ To explain a given racial formation, then, requires that we break it down into its constituent mechanisms and uncover the linkages between them. Such linkages, for example, between stigma and segregation or between idioms of exclusion and discriminatory practices, have to be empirically parsed and analytically reconstructed: they can neither be assumed nor grasped at the level of discourse. Indeed, by properly differentiating its interlocking forms, we will find out that "tactical mobility" is a property not of racial discourse but of

the whole complex of relations and technologies through which racial domination operates.

To conclude, I agree with Ann Laura Stoler that we need reflexive histories of "racial discourse" that embrace the intricate interlacings of lay and scholarly knowledges and unearth the subterranean epistemological and sociopolitical premises governing their production, circulation, and consumption. But we need much more than that. We need to forge an analytic of racial domination capable of capturing the simultaneous malleability and obdurateness of racial divisions along with the diversity of symbolic and material mechanisms whereby these are drawn, enforced, and challenged. To do this we must discard the notion of "racism" and its logocentric bias, clearly demarcate sociological categories from ethnoracial common sense, and renounce the urge to denounce fed by the logic of the trial.

True to her inspirator and yet reaching beyond him, Ann Laura Stoler has fulfilled the part of the Foucauldian intellectual, which is "to work so that others may not have such good conscience" (Foucault 1994, p. 749). Now it remains for us to turn bad conscience into good scholarship, instead of the other way around.

NOTES

1. I use sociology in the generic (Durkheimian) sense of disciplined social inquiry, subsuming for convenience anthropology, history, and sociology *stricto sensu*. I place "race" between quotation marks to signal that I do not accord analytic status to the term. A "trope of ultimate, irreducible difference" (Gates 1993, p. 5) cannot and should not be a conceptual tool, only an object to be constructed. This is a matter not of stylistic preciosity but of epistemological salubrity (remember Bachelard's formula: "Science is a pair of inverted commas").

Page references to Ann Laura Stoler's article are indicated parenthetically in the text.

2. This dubious doublet (which element did the author intend and which does the reader understand?) is indicative of the built-in ambiguity that I discuss below under the rubric of the "demarcation problem" and the "logic of the trial."

3. Duster (1996, p. 120) puts it succinctly as follows: "The central problem is that 'race' is now, and has been since 1735, both a first-order construct and a second-order construct."

4. See, in particular Schiebinger (1993, Ch. 4) and Banton (1989, Ch. 1).

5. Classifying humans emerged in the eighteenth century, the "great age of classification," as part and parcel of a broader enterprise of taxonomy made both possible and necessary by the void created by the discrediting of the theological worldview. Here I must side with Michael Adas against Stoler (p. 196): science does mark a watershed in the history of ethnoracial division.

6. This explains why American sociology of "race" was incapable of anticipating the black revolt against America's racial order in the 1950s and 60s: this was not merely an empirical or conceptual failure—in addition to a moral and political one—as argued by McKee (1993), but the result of a more serious epistemic ataxia.

7. The fact that researchers from different countries read the same phenomena through the prism of different societal doxai explains that there is so little circulation of scholarship on "race" across national boundaries, despite some progress in the past decade (see Wacquant 1992).

8. The peculiarity of American racial classification is highlighted in Davis (1991) and its historical roots recounted in Williamson (1980); compare also Dominguez (1991) and Lopez (1996).

For evidence of the international dominance of U.S. conceptions, consult, for instance, the Brazilian journal *Estudos Afro-Asiáticos* published by the Conjunto Candido Mendes in Rio de Janeiro (which is, in spite of this, arguably one of the most lively and broad-ranging fora on "race" anywhere). There are long-standing and resilient poles of resistance to American hegemony in Europe but these must still define themselves defensively, by opposition to U.S.-derived conceptions (e.g., Miles 1993).

The recent "discovery" of the "globalization of race" (e.g., Winant 1994) is in good measure the result of the quasi-universalization of American (folk) understandings of racial division effected by the worldwide export of U.S. scholarly categories. The Summer 1996 issue of *Dissent* on "Embattled Minorities Around the Globe: Rights, Hopes, Threats" offers a good illustration of this imperialistic imposition operating under the guise of crossnational argumentation. It projects onto the whole of humanity U.S. liberal common sense (and U.S. liberal guilt or good conscience) along with the category of "minority," which presupposes precisely what is being contested in social reality: that "culturally" or "ethnically" defined subgroups within a given nation-state are or should be entitled to some measure of civic and political recognition.

9. It so happens that, just as I am writing these lines, yet another public controversy has erupted in France after LePen declared that he "believe[s] in the inequality between the races." I note this to emphasize that the question here is not whether LePen is racist, by whatever definition one chooses. It is that every moderately cosmopolitan reader of Stoler's article will have supplied the missing link between her argument and example without even realizing it.

10. "If social scientists continue to use the term 'race'... because people *act* as though 'race' exists, then they are guilty of conferring analytical status on what is nothing more than an ideological construction" (Phizacklea 1988, p. 200). Banton (1979), among others, has argued forcefully in favor of granting analytic status to the concept of "race" on grounds that: (i) try as they may, sociologists simply cannot disentangle themselves from it; and (ii) social science concepts ought to be continuous with commonsense ones. In my view, this amounts to surrender before waging battle and misinterprets the imperative of *Verstehen*.

11. Thus the compulsory rhetorical figure of proclamation of one's abhorrence of racism: nearly every book on the topic contains a passage in which the author ritually affirms her desire to fight it and its noxious consequences—as if expressions of goodwill and certificates of moral valor had anything to do with empirical perceptiveness and theoretical rigor. Stoler's article closes on an appeal to continue the fight against racism in the face of the "New Right's sophisticated cultural politics that so fiercely denies" its reality.

12. I refrain from citing specific studies to avoid the appearance of *ad hominem* argumentation; the interested reader can scan the gamut of studies published in the past ten years and immediately make out which fit this pattern (one signal exception is Andrews 1991). It would also be easy to show that tonal shifts in scholarly depictions of Brazilian "race relations" mirror the oscillations in the attitudes of African-American intellectuals towards Brazil throughout the twentieth century (as documented by Hellwig 1992).

13. For a demonstration of the fruitfulness of this approach see, Cope (1994).

14. Here we see again how the attraction of the logic of the trial is enhanced by the absence of clear frontier between common sense and sociological analysis, or, to be more accurate, the wide intersection between lay and scholarly common sense.

15. See Miles (1993). MacDougall (1982) recounts the racialization of Saxons and Normans during the confrontation between the Norman monarchy and the Saxon peasantry and parliament in early modern England.

16. See Dikötter (1992); on other Asian racial traditions, see Price (1966), Wagatsuma (1968), and Sabouret (1983).

17. Chinese beliefs about human physical discontinuity and inequality are particularly interesting because they considered skin tone an impermanent characteristic liable to change with exposition to cold and heat, with the result that "whiteness as a factor in racial differentiation

was dismissed as a myth" (Dikötter 1992, p. 136). Under the impetus of the New Culture movement, the ideal of Occidentalism, and the spread of the press during the first Republic, Chinese racial thinking came to base its taxonomies first on blood purity (in an effort to salvage Sinocentrism), then on hair (hairiness being associated with bestiality), odor (each "race" with its own distinctive smell), and brain size (conveniently recomputed as "relative cranial capacity" so as to put the Chinese on top). Last and least reliable came skin color, admitting of ten shades, with pure yellow reserved for the Chinese.

18. I attempted elsewhere to apply these principles to "The Puzzle of Race and Class in American Society and Social Science" (see Wacquant 1989).

A puzzling omission in Stoler's account of "racial regimes of truth," given her own historiographic interests, is the production of the racially conformed body—what elsewhere she aptly calls "the education of desire" (Stoler 1995).

19. A compact historico-analytical summation of this process is in Miles (1989, pp. 41-68).

20. Illustrations of such confusion abound in Gregory and Sanjek (1995).

21. An excellent study of the systemic nature of racial domination and its material grounding, as distinct from its discursive incarnation, is Greenberg (1980).

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THE ESSENTIAL AMBIGUITIES OF RACE AND RACISM

Uday Singh Mehta

I

Racism is famously difficult to define or pin down.¹ In this truism lies much of the tenacity of its insidious persistence. Part of the difficulty of course is the sheer range of phenomena with which the term is linked and the unclear commonality underlying its various expressions. The Hindu caste system and slavery were at a minimum predicated on a exploitative conception of social and economic order, and in which, therefore, the systematic extermination of those exploited would have been antithetical to that order. In contrast, Nazism was directed to precisely such an extermination. And then there are the myriad injustices, attitudes, exclusions, ways of address and even gestures that surround the concept and its usage. But there is a deeper reason for racism elusiveness. Ironically it has to do with its apparent simplicity.

Racist doctrines, at least in their erudite or theoretically articulate expressions, are predicated on the view that races exist; that is, that there are human groups whose members possess common and usually self evident physical characteristics. Moreover, the existence of such groups is deemed to

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supply important political, psychological and social information about the predilections and potentialities of races and their individual members. During much of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, in the context of European imperialism, this information undergirded a vast range of institutional arrangements regarding who could be politically represented, employment and educational restrictions, membership in civic organizations, marriage laws, and much of the minutiae for imperial authority. Indeed, from the mid-nineteenth century onward, race and its cognate associations, was arguably the centerpiece of what was understood as "civilization," which itself was the key stone of the theoretical and popular justification of European imperialism. Even a broad minded liberal like John Stuart Mill, found considerations of race decisively relevant to defending the limitations on representative government which he proposed for the non-Anglo-Saxon parts of the British empire (Mill 1975, p. 402).

The alluring simplicity of racism—on account of which many of the best European and American minds of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries gave it credence, and more often than not the hallowed cast of "scientific" warrant—is in the link which allows a plethora of potentialities, dispositions and attitudes to be read of from self evident physical characteristics, or somatic types.² To have the realm of politics, culture and psychology along with their normative extensions, neatly determined along two or three gross physical configurations, greatly simplifies things, quite apart from other advantages that typically accrued to the protagonists of such views. It purports to make the fixed and visibly simple exterior the index of the fluid, invisible and complex, and by this mapping reduces the parameters of the latter to that of the former. In its more deterministic versions, racism imagines human potentialities as limited by their pre-historic origins, further constrained by a racist conception of inheritance, the realm of social meaning inscribed in chromosome locations, culture as biology, and choices in altering power relations limited to the narrow scope opened up by the glacial rate of evolutionary and civilizational change. To the extent that there is any latitude left for ethics or philosophy it is merely to decipher the predetermined channels suggested by the "science" that the proponents affirmed (Todorov 1993; Appiah 1995).

At its core, the ideal and fantasy of eighteenth and nineteenth century racism was scientific. It shared the latter's commitment to simplicity in explanations and more specifically, it attempted to simplify the complexities of the social world by seeing them as naturalistically determined. Finally it shared the assumption, that the fact of global pluralism, in the various ways in which Europe experienced it, was largely immune from volitional transformation.³ More recent racism seldom relies, at least explicitly, on the self-confident scientism of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Its ideas are usually cast in the language of cultural rationality and preferences, which, it is alleged, are correlated with gross morphological differences (D'Souza 1995). But this

change is more apparent than real, for culture is implicitly biologized, into a hypostatized racial immobility. In its epistemic impulses it remains substantially tied to the coattails of its precursors. In this latter sense, Shakespeare's Prospero sets out the archetype for subsequent elaborations. Of Caliban, the "born devil" Prospero claims "on whose nature/Nurture can never stick" (*The Tempest*, IV.i. 188-189).

But the simplicity of this articulate racism has always been betrayed by its own deterministic fantasy. It has never been true to its own ideas in the sense that they were never the actual basis of its practice. For one thing, the biological and somatic conception of race is, if not totally unsustainable, at least fraught with severely disabling ambiguities. The relevant variations within so called racial groups are often as great as those that allegedly constitute the basis of there being, in the first place, distinct groups. And therefore they do not offer a criterion of group identity or separateness. For instance, hair curl varies both within different racial groups and across them. The same is true for genetic and morphological factors.⁴ In fact, to the limited degree that contemporary biologists deploy the category of race, it has nothing in common with the static and essentialized understanding offered by racialists (Appiah 1992, 1996). Indeed it is far from clear that the biological view has any social implications (Appiah 1992, 1996). Of course, this is not to say that one could not come up with classificatory systems that group people together. Obviously this is a trivial task. One could have all sorts of classifications—people taller than six feet, men over two hundred pounds, dog owners who live in Kansas and—yes—systems based on hair curl, skin pigmentations, and bone structure.

The point, however, is not whether one can come up with classifications that group people, but rather, whether those classifications supply a good measure of the group and its members potentialities, dispositions, and moral and political competencies—the very information that racists purport to read off from the mere existence of races. Put differently, what racists need is a credible somatic or biological index which allows them to circumvent the realm of language, socially constructed meanings, contextual and material inducements—in brief, the broad domain of culture and history along with their contingencies—by referring solely to the biological or somatic. Clearly even biological indexes can be powerful predictors of many things. One can, for instance, predict with virtual certainty that anyone below the height of five feet will not be a success in the NBA. But such predictions and the classifications on which they are based, do not allow us to circumvent cultural and historical considerations, nor do they constitute the sort of groups that racists have in mind. After all even the claim regarding the virtual requirement of being taller than five feet to be a success in the NBA is squarely dependent on the height at which the basket is placed—something on which there has been regular statutory changes in the history of basketball. In making this point, Appiah offers a very helpful and elegant analogy:

trying to classify people into a few races is like trying to classify books in a library: you may use a single property—size, say—but you will get a useless classification, or you may use a more complex system of interconnected criteria, and then you get a good deal of arbitrariness. No one—not even the most compulsive librarian!—thinks that book classification reflects deep facts about books (Appiah 1992).

What is arbitrary in the library is prejudice in the social world, where what are being classified are the worth and potentialities of human beings based on, as it were, their covers.

The arbitrariness which Appiah refers to is indicative of an essential aspect of racism, namely, that it is not, at least analytically, predicated on the truth of racialism—the theory that races exist. For there is no such truth. More often than not the theory is an instance of the practice. And the practice, far from circumventing language, culture and history, as the theory purports to do, turns on the selective deployment of these very considerations. But this invoking of the realm of culture and history is itself carried out through the feint of a theoretical repudiation of what is central to culture and history, namely, contingency and the constant and inescapable modifications effected by the social world. Even when, as in more recent times, the extravagant biologically grounded racism of say Gobineau, Renan, and Taine is dispensed with, and replaced with a post-Lamarckian cultural emphasis, the strategy remains much the same. The somatic type now gets associated with a hypostatized history and culture. In this lies the deeper basis to the elusive nature of racism: a theory that cannot acknowledge what its instantiation or practice relies on, namely, the constantly changing domain in which relations of power, inequality, and ideas infuse our prejudices while veiling them in the language of science and cultural naturalism. Race is quintessentially an ideology in the double sense in which Rousseau and Marx understood the term; first as something that powerfully conceals, by distorting, the inner workings of a particular social order, and second, because it is as powerful as it is, it nevertheless has an almost independent power to mold peoples beliefs, preferences and even identities.

Perhaps the most vivid historical illustration of this point comes from what are arguably the most protracted and murderous examples of racism: the Hindu caste system and the Holocaust. At the level of practice, neither could have occurred without paralyzing risk to their perpetrators if they were based on somatic indicators. As it was the entire constellation of language (surnames, for instance, are virtually essential to caste classifications),⁵ historical, cultural and economic factors were inconspicuously though obviously deployed to mobilize these regimes. The yellow insignia which the Nazi's forced Jews to wear to facilitate their identification, segregation and murder was also a testament to the failure of their racial world view. For it was the sign which stigmatized the body, precisely because the body would not, could not, reliably stigmatize itself. And the sign was not *of* the body, but of a plethora of external

and historically refracted prejudices that were stamped with murderous rectitude onto the body to make it reflect those prejudices—as *though* they were facts about itself.

What is true of the caste system and the Holocaust is, only less obviously, true of other examples of racism. Behind the feint of somatic fixity, they all rely on the selective deployment of the shifting vagaries of culture and history. They all insist, if no longer on the purity of races, of race as at least constituting a coherent category whose stability is not thoroughly and irredeemably implicated in fluid historical and cultural associations together with the exigencies of power that consolidate prejudices in the guise of naturalism, and thus support the illusion of this coherence. The important point is not that terms such as "black," "white," or "hispanic" can have no clear referent or meaning—even though such clarity exists despite an assured and almost universal fact that such terms have no pure or "unmixed" extant form; rather, it is that when these terms are used in racist discourse—that is, as the source of political, psychological and moral information—their meaning does not turn solely or even primarily on pigmentation or morphology but on historical and cultural associations and the political and economic factors that attend them. Its worth recalling in this context that Homer Adolph Plessy was a Creole gentleman who could have easily passed as white in Louisiana during the late nineteenth century. It was the law and the precedent established in *Plessy v. Ferguson* that designated him as a Negro and in doing so allowed Louisiana to segregate citizens as members of "separate but equal" races.

The claim that racist discourse and practice deploy cultural and other contingent considerations while ostensibly denying this, must however, itself be sharply distinguished from the view that racial essence can or should be understood in cultural terms. The objection to racial thinking is not simply its incoherence which gets expressed in its intellectual dishonesty, but rather and equally, its refusal to acknowledge contingency, experimentation and choice as fundamental to individual and group identity. And for this reason, a culturally essentialized view to race is, at least potentially, as pernicious as a biological or somatically grounded one. They all conceptually confine individuals by *fixing* certain associations either to their alleged biology, their appearance, or the circumstances of their development and history. And in doing so, they all practically seek to limit individuals and groups to some pre-formed conception of their actual potential. I will say more on the issue of *fixing* certain associations on people and how in this process racism reveals its arbitrariness, which of course is not to say that it is not motivated by reasons but that those reasons are tangential to its purported claims about the grounds for grouping people. In the present context it is important to make clear that this idea of *fixing* associations in no way limits or settles the issue of which particular traits get *fixed* or the imperatives that motivate such *fixing*. The long history of racism makes it clear that there is enormous variation on both counts,

and that allusions to traits being natural to certain groups, in some weighty sense suggesting permanence, are betrayed by that history. The important point is that it is through the *fixing* of associations that the group is constituted and not the group or its characteristics that either biologically or somatically selects the associations. Racism has very little to do with blood, pigmentation, morphology or culture; it is itself as mobile as the false fixity it ascribes to its purported subject.

II

Anne Stoler has done more than perhaps any contemporary scholar to expose the cultural and racial tangle through which imperial authority in the nineteenth century was exercised, and by which it represented its power. In that context, as elsewhere, racial thought and practice often characterized themselves as predicated on a simple and stable visual filter through which the colonized and the colonizers could, as it were, be "self-evidently" classified and the former "administered." Surprisingly, this assumption has undergirded much of subsequent postcolonial scholarship despite the distinctly anti-racist commitments of most of this work. In contrast, Stoler has pointed out with incredible historical and ethnographic richness and wide ranging theoretical sophistication, that race, in the Dutch imperial context was none of those things; it was neither simple, stable, visually anchored and certainly not self-evident (Stoler 1989, 1991, 1992, 1995). Imperial power did not act on obvious or "natural" racial distinctions but rather created them in ways that allowed and required this power to be disseminated into the capillaries of native and European societies. Moreover, the imperatives that informed this multiply-inflected project were never simply the exercise of power over the natives or even the extraction of profits, but rather equally, "the uncertainties about what constituted the inclusionary distinctions of bourgeois culture in the Netherlands..." (Stoler 1995).

In pointing to the conditions for the possibility of racism, Stoler aptly and insightfully refers to the "disparity between the 'seen' and the 'unseen'" and the necessary "ambiguity" and "slip" between "the somatic and the inner self, the phenotype and genotype, pigment shade and psychological sensibility" (Stoler, this volume, p. 187). These slippages are not mere accidents where the practice violates the theory, but rather integral to the practice and instances in which, as I have suggested, the theory is better understood as being driven by the practice and the motives that are alloyed to it.⁶ Moreover Stoler, makes clear that the imperial and the racial imperatives were never simply related to each other as matters of ends and means. Indeed, her scholarship suggests that the very distinction would have made little contemporaneous sense. Each had a complex logic which worked along and through the multiple axes of class,

gender, geography, sexual conformity, cultural competence, in addition, to economic and administrative efficacy. In much the same way that in the United States law could transform the status of a man who could pass as "white" into a "Negro" and in doing so introduce a racial component where conceivably none might have existed, merely being born in the Indies in the mid nineteenth century could exclude well-heeled white families from the status of being Europeans, and yet, at times the referent of that term included Japanese, Africans and Chinese (Stoler 1995, pp. 104-105). In another instance, Stoler points to the fascinating example of the *inlandsche kinderen* who were neither natives nor children but simply poor whites sometimes of mixed-blood origins. Their existence in the Dutch Indies motivated an important initiative by the imperial authorities which was plainly an attempt to secure middle class cultural respectability, but now done through the discourse of racial superiority (Stoler, 1995, pp. 106-110). Only by putting aside the simplistic ocular obsession, which is clearly not evinced in the examples of Plessy, native born "Europeans" and the *inlandsche kinderen*, but which remains as the central focus of much of post-colonial and anti-racist scholarship, can one appreciate these examples for what they were, namely the discourse of racism and empire in practice (Stoler, this volume, pp. 186, 197).

In all these examples, as in the case of the Holocaust, the caste system, and *Plessy v. Ferguson*, the discourse and practice of racism are plainly dissociated from any credible understanding of biology, appearance or culturally essential human traits. Something much more complex and multi-layered than the professed simplicity of the natural classification of human beings is involved here. We risk missing this crucial and characteristic (though not unique) feature of racism, if we as scholars, implicitly or explicitly accept racism on its own terms as something that deals with physical or biological types with corresponding immutable traits.⁷ This, as I understand it, is the deep and fundamental insight of Stoler's recent work. Racism, like imperialism, as Homi Bhabha first pointed out in a series of important articles functions in a field of "sly," "ambivalent" and "mimicking" circularity.⁸ Their force, peculiar resilience and manifold expressions can only be understood when one sees in them a complex set of imperatives which often operate at cross purposes but which in any case are not elucidated by the unsuspicious acceptance of categories such as biology, appearance, cultural essences, and even colonizer and colonized. The language of contradictions seldom captures the fullness of this process because, as Bhabha points out, imperialism speaks "in a tongue that is forked, not false" (Bhabha 1994, p. 85).

Stoler's point regarding the polyvalence of racism is further underlined by the complexity of the interdictions that these various examples occasioned. They range from outright mass murder, to restrictions on occupational and ritual practices, social and educational segregation and discrimination, to the Dutch state getting involved in the details of correct forms of child rearing,

surveilling sexual practices and facilitating appropriate linguistic competence to secure middle-class respectability and therefore having to concern itself with the intricacies of schooling and curricula development. There are no common or enduring underlying political interests here and no thematic unity either (Stoler, this volume, p. 194). Moreover, neither is there normative unity here. For racism and imperialism to be viewed as normatively unified, one has to take a perspective that is so abstract that it misses the details of the flexible logic—often their most pernicious and tenacious features—through which these regimes function.

Of course one might, as some have, conclude from these examples and the responses they occasioned that these are not valid or at any rate pure instances of racism. That instead they are better understood through categories such as class, gender, the imperatives of bureaucratic rationality, insecure and assertive nationalism and a host of other explanatory options. As a possibility, explanations can always in principle be enriched or invalidated by alternatives. But the objection in any case misses the point of how racism functions and the subtlety of Stoler's understanding. Like imperialism, racism also operates as it were with a forked tongue. Its language always has a refracted relationship to the reality with which it is concerned. And this no less true of what are sometimes taken to be pure examples of the phenomenon. Even when explicit reference is made to biology, somatic types or cultural traits, as was the case with much of nineteenth century racial discourse, their meaning when judged by the implications which the authors drew from this language, is never, as I have argued in section I, credible in terms of these attributes alone. Gobineau's ideas on cranial forms, facial features, beauty, physical strength and intellectual capacities just do not support his views on, or sanction his cruel actions, in Algeria (Gobineau 1983). These were in fact, as became obvious to de Tocqueville after he traveled with Gobineau in Algeria, linguistic and intellectual decoys through which ideas regarding the glory and interests of France, her relative standing *vis* Britain and what it meant to be European, got articulated and acted on. That is to say, they were prejudices or preferences of a local historical valency with all the contingency and pliability that comes with that, but which nevertheless, took the form of something beyond and immune from history, culture, and politics—the hubris of *sub specie aeternitatis*. As an aside, this characteristic concern with immutability, essences and eternal perspectives might cast some light on the strange obsession that philosophers in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries had with ideas regarding race, and similarly, why so often non-philosophers expressed views on race in an apparently philosophic form.

Stoler's emphasis on the mobility or polyvalence of racism—a point which distinguishes her perspective from most contemporary scholars writing on the topic—is essential to understanding the phenomenon. It helps explain, as her own ethnographic and historical scholarship does, why for example so often

today, as also in the past, racist ideas do not need to invoke the language of race at all.⁹ George Bush's infamous Willy Horton advertisement was in its literal graphics about an African-American convict who had raped and murdered while on furlough. In the view of its defenders, it had nothing to do with race and hence implied no racist sub-text. Either disingenuously or otherwise, such a defense denies what is crucial to racism, which is not the literal level *simpliciter* but rather the associated linkages with the literal statement. Here again the novelty of contemporary racism is in the specifics of the sign and the associations they summon, and presume on, and not in the mere fact that they traffic in such associations. This claim does not imply a normative equivalence between contemporary racism and older racism. Mass murder or slavery are not the same as denying educational equality or welfare support to certain people. And yet all of these share in the *modus operandi* of racism. Moreover, in much the same way that talk about convicts, furlough, rape and murder can stand in as the unsaid text about race, race in the form of ethnic group identity can be the stand in for the unsaid about poverty, gender and a politically assertive Christian morality, as much of the contemporary discussion on welfare "cheats" and teen-age mothers makes clear.¹⁰

III

Stoler's emphasis on the mobility of racism helps draw out a point which I suspect has always been clear to anti-racist activists but which anti-racist scholarship strangely has often overlooked and misunderstood. It is that racisms are not, from a normative standpoint, gainfully distinguished by reference to their origins and still less on their epistemic commitments, for they all share in and draw on this mobility of associated linkages. That is just how racism functions. The important distinguishing feature is in the associations that distinct racist regimes fix on people and the confines within which they constrain them and the opportunities they sometimes offer them.

Race is a series of strategies. For the most part, it has serviced retrograde interests. But occasionally this has not been the case. Mahatma Gandhi's temporary sidelining of progressives whites from helping in the Indian nationalist struggle was a racist strategy based on a consequential assessment of the situation on the ground. But the ethics of that move, the interests of which it was a strategic part, were at least primarily the securing of national independence.¹¹ And then there are examples where the consciousness of race being a strategy or, to use Judith Butler's very appropriate term,¹² a performance, becomes the basis of an entire way of life; one can think of Davy Crockett, T.E. Lawrence, Ralph Ellison, Anatole Broyard, Michael Jackson, Mr. T with his mohawk, decked in the chains and paraphernalia of slavery but now cast in gold, and of course that consummate racial and imperial

trickster Kipling's Kim. In all these cases the protagonists deploy the inherent ambivalence of race with a subversive, experimental and ironic verve. They open up imaginative alternatives. And in doing so they challenge the fixations of another set of racial strategies, linked for the most part to a narrow and confining social and political imaginary world and alloyed to similar interests. At a broader level, one can think of modern day Cuba where despite a significant range of somatic and pigment variation in the population, race has not assumed the divisive valency it has elsewhere. What I imagine activists have always understood is that the best way to challenge the pernicious confinements of racism is by exposing and creating alternatives to the interests that particular racist strategies service. Relying on the epistemological alternative is fraught with questionable metaphysical contortions and uncertain concrete gains. This is, I think, what the late Justice Marshall had in mind when shortly before his death and while recalling his advocacy in *Brown v. Board of Education* he said "I don't know if God created us equal, but I do know that if we give black kids equal educational opportunities they might just prove that we are equal."¹³

Racism is a style of thinking and acting with regard to things other than race. There is no conundrum in this claim if one recognizes that there is no such thing as a stable conception of race in the first place. It is a category that becomes operative when for strategic or tactical reasons issues of class, gender, social norms, morality and even relations between states can only, or at any rate most conveniently, be expressed in ways that conceal the contingency, mutability and prospective refashioning of these very interests.

NOTES

1. I am indebted to Carol Horton for discussing with me the issues dealt with in this paper and for setting me straight on a number of them.

2. In the long history of racist thought considerations of blood, genetic variance and other biological factors which are not self evident have elicited substantial attention. But in racist thought these considerations are never, to my knowledge, divorced from gross somatic factors pertaining to skin color, morphology and degree of hair curl. The distinction between racialist and racist thought is developed in Todorov 1993, Ch. 2). For a helpful overview of some biological reflections on race see, Nei and Roychoudhury (1983).

3. On the link between racist doctrines and science, in the manner that the proponents of the latter imagined it see Todorov (1993, Ch. 2).

4. This point is forcefully defended by Appiah 1992, Ch. 2). Appiah cites Nei and Roychoudhury who argue that "the extent of genic differentiation between human races is not always correlated with the degree of morphological differentiation," Nei and Roychoudhury 1983, p. 44). Also see Hoffman (1994).

5. Of course even surnames are far from being determinate or precise indicators of caste. To the extent that precision in this is at all possible it requires consideration of domicile, occupation, inter-caste marriages, and all this viewed over varying durations (see, Dumont 1966; and the *Census of India 1931*).

6. Of course such slippages are often evident in racist theories themselves. John Stuart Mill's fervent commitment to representative government and individual liberties, conditional on an appropriate level of civilizational development is, for instance, betrayed when he comes to reflect on the British Empire. In this context he makes the introduction of democratic institutions conditional on the distinction between those who "are of our blood" (in his view, Canadians and Australians) and those who are not of European blood stock. With regard to the latter, Mill is insistent that democratic institutions even within the framework of the empire, are unsuitable. By making this conclusion dependent on "blood" it is at least implicit, and Mill says nothing to the contrary, that the unsuitability is not merely a matter of untimeliness which could be reversed in the future. See Mill (1975, Ch. 18); also see, Parekh (1994). Todorov (1993, Ch. 2) offers similar examples with respect to Hippolyte Taine, Gustave Le Bon and Renan and their ambivalent deployment of science and history with respect to race.

7. There is a similar ambivalence, analogous to the distinction Stoler makes between the seen and the unseen, in the Lockean conception of reason. For Locke, reason, through its link with the laws of nature, is the basis of freedom and hence of a consensual and broadly inclusionary government. Yet upon inspection it turns out that what is involved in having or acquiring reason is anything but inclusionary and in fact turns on a host of conventional and highly selective and often class specific attributes. I have argued this claim in Mehta (1992, Chs. 3, 4, 1989).

8. These articles collected in Bhabha (1994). See in particular the essays, all of which have been reprinted in this volume, "Sly Civility," "Articulating the Archaic: Cultural Difference and Colonial Nonsense," and "Of Mimicry and Man: The Ambivalence of Colonial Discourse."

9. This is central theme is in Dinesh D'Souza's book *The End of Racism*.

10. Such claims obviously involve an aspect of interpretation and normative judgment. Many, for instance, interpret the contemporary discussion on welfare and teenage pregnancy as a surrogate for not speaking about African-American and poor immigrant groups. In the present context such differences of opinion are tangential to the point I am making.

11. Of course, if one is on ethical grounds a strong anti-consequentialist one would interpret this "strategy" as having clear ethical weight. But it seems to me that the history of racial practice, including its contemporary expressions, is better understood in terms of the motives of actors from non-consequentialist perspective. This of course makes plain my own more Weberian take on matters of historical interpretation and ethics.

12. Judith Butler speaks mainly about the performative gestures through which the body gets constituted as a gendered entity, but her argument, it seems to me, carries similar force with respect to the racializing the body (Butler 1990, Chs. 1, 3).

13. Justice Thurgood Marshall interview on *National Public Radio* (date ?). I recall this statement from memory and may, therefore, not have the wording exactly correct.

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ON THE POLITICS OF EPISTEMOLOGIES

Ann Laura Stoler

I take these commentaries from such a seasoned group of scholars of racisms' histories with an appreciation of the thoughtfulness and engagement they bring to them. My reactions are two: on the one hand, to examine my own assumptions about audience and emphasis that might push my project further; on the other hand, to reconfirm my analytic convictions and more clearly state the sorts of arguments that underwrite my claims. My comments will be brief, in part because questions raised by some commentaries are deftly answered (better than I could do) by others, and in part because responses to some queries would entail the sort of fine-grained accounts of racisms' histories that I would hope the essay provokes and that it intends to suggest.

I will not take the time to rehearse at length those aspects of my argument with which the respondents and I seem to agree: that the issue of intellectual complicity in racial discourse should be more squarely and reflectively addressed in our scholarly agendas, or that racial discourses are characterized by a "tactical mobility" whose consequences we have underestimated. As Virginia Dominguez has so well argued, "students of racism erroneously perceive themselves to be outside the discourse of racism," an observation that prompts her to "seek to echo that call for greater awareness of practical complicity and greater attention to self-implicating practices" (Dominguez

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1994). Scholarly complicity is one of the issues on which we concur, but I am more concerned with the reasons for it. I see that complicity as symptomatic of the assumptions about the ways of knowing race on which scholars rely.

There are thus two more pressing issues on which I want to focus here: one, the questioning of my claim that originary narratives of racisms' histories may have some bearing on racial politics today; and two, what I take to be a central and crucial part of my argument: namely the observation that what we think we know and do not question about racial epistemes—and specifically the relationship between the somatic and the invisible coordinates of race—that only Uday Mehta takes up, is left virtually unaddressed. Whether that silence is because the questions I pose about *how* we know race seem too commonsense or alternately too counterintuitive, whether that silence signals a fundamental disagreement or the need for a more explicit clarification on my part, the relationship between epistemology and political practice seems worth exploring further.

Both Virginia Dominguez and David Roediger question why it matters to contemporary politics that histories of racism are written as originary narratives. Virginia Dominguez asks why I find them so "troubling," if all in the final analysis, condemn racism. David Roediger too asks why it matters "that we locate the origins of racism in the rise of capitalism? In conquest and dispossession? In slavery?" And in a somewhat different vein, Loïc Wacquant suggests that the attention to "discourse" is misplaced, that what people say and think about racism and presumably the stories we tell about what they think are less important than the "technologies and practices" by which racial domination is enforced.

There are a number of important issues here and I want to be clear about what I am and am not saying. Virginia Dominguez rightly observes that I am uncomfortable with certain uses of history and wonders if I am going so far as to advocate a move away from historicism, that we give up writing histories of racism at all, a stance she notes would be surprising from someone like myself who has invested so much in just that enterprise. The answer is an emphatic "no." I am not suggesting we abandon historiographic work or do less of it, but that we do more of it and do it better. At issue, of course, is what I mean by "more" and by "better."

My critique is directed at a quest for origins and a definition of history that derives from it. It strikes me that both Nietzsche's and Foucault's insights that a pursuit of origins traps us in an "attempt to capture the exact essence of things, their purest possibilities, and their carefully protected identities" is on the mark (Foucault 1984, p. 78). It is, I think, an obvious point with profound implications; the pursuit of origins that constitutes "traditional history" is a moral pursuit that is fundamentally ahistoric. The lesson is one that feminist scholars have learnt well, making it more surprising that those of us who work on the gendered coordinates of racisms' histories have not learnt it better. As

Margaret Conkey noted in a trenchant critique of the gender assumptions that underwrite much of archaeology's "original narratives," such narratives "actually reflect notions of gender in the recent past, while heavily influencing our construction of gender in the present" (Conkey 1991). On the terrain of race I would make a slightly different point: not that such originary pursuits "influence" the social constructions of the race in the present, but that a search for racisms' origins both shapes and is shaped by how we think about race in the present and what we imagine is effective anti-racist scholarship today.

I am not suggesting that good politics alone makes good history but rather that those of us engaged in writing racisms' histories need to think more about the kinds of beginnings we look for, and the analytic stance we take toward them. Such a critique might be guided by what Foucault once called "the art of reflective insolence," insolence toward the stories we tell ourselves about racisms' historical "culprits," and insolence toward the ways of knowing race on which we depend. I am not suggesting that because we are so "inside" racial discourse ourselves that all histories are damned and irrelevant. I am suggesting that our genealogies of racisms should register more complicated accounts than those predicated on a linear, evolutionary story. What Foucault calls an "effective history" might attend to the "minute deviations" in what is agreed to be "true," to the "reversals" in the criteria of what counts as a racial type and what does not, to the sudden "usurpation... of a vocabulary against those who once used it" as so many ways of cutting through a model of a racism rooted in this or that "lofty origin" (Foucault 1984, pp. 81, 88). I have tried to argue that "flattened" Manichean histories that attribute the past power of racisms to notions of fixity, permanency, somatics and biology in contrast to the fluidity and culturally subtle racisms of the present miss the fact that racisms thrive on both the uncertainties of the nonvisual and the sureties of the visual. The very fact that "evidence" of race is so varied and so changing is fundamental to the regimes of truth on which racisms are based.

A second basic point of clarification. Loïc Wacquant argues that we need to go "beyond discourse," that we do not need a "new rhetorics of (and on) racial discourse... but an analytic of racial domination," that we should take our cues not from "the early Foucault" but from the "later Foucault of *Discipline and Punish* and the *Care of the Self*." There are several problems here. One is that for Wacquant, "discourse" seems to reduce to "rhetoric" and for me, it does not. Wacquant is certainly not alone in attributing to Foucault a pernicious influence as a major social theorist whose early work steeped us in disembodied language games. But by my reading of Foucault, discursive analysis is nothing of the sort, nor are the preoccupations of the "early Foucault" later abandoned by him. As I have argued elsewhere, Foucault's attention to an archaeology of knowledge in 1972 and to the biopolitics of state racism in his 1976 Collège de France lectures is directly tied to his later concerns with governmentality, specification of the relationship between the

regulation and governing of the social body, and the governing and cultivation of the self. Each of these ventures, as the "late" Foucault himself noted, are efforts to question the nature of political rationalities (Stoler 1995; Foucault 1981).

Taking discursive formations seriously is a way of broaching head on the fact that how we speak and what is unspeakable in written and oral form shape the categories of exclusion and inclusion in which we live. Attention to discursive formations is a focused engagement with the cultural and political rationalities that make certain statements renderable as speech, with what discursive practices produce the conditions of possibility for why we take some statements to be adequate truth-claims and not others. Attention to the formation of discursive practices is just that, about *practices* that are culturally sedimented as doxas that seem to carve nature at its joints, but that are cultural constructions of specific historical moments. Others have battled long and hard over whether attention to "discourse" diverts analysis from the political economy in which people live. I will not rehearse their arguments here but simply register my strong agreement with Ian Hacking's argument that the labeling of human kinds is more than a passive system of classification of pre-existing social entities, of that which already is, but a way of producing those subjects who will be so assigned (Hacking 1991, 1986). The battle lines between those committed to an analysis of discourse and those who see themselves more concerned with the analysis of grounded political and economic relations of power are unproductive and too sharply drawn. Some of the distinctions dissolve if we take the making and imposition of political rationalities to constitute part of the "political" in political economy. As the "late" Foucault put it in his 1979 Tanner Lecture on political reason:

Those who resist or rebel against a form of power cannot merely be content to denounce violence or criticise an institution. Nor is it enough to cast the blame on reason in general. What has to be questioned is the form of rationality at stake.

The status of "discourse" then is not really the source of our disagreement, but rather what I see as the politics of epistemology. The ways in which we know the world are not and should not be dismissed as the disembodied preoccupations of philosophers and left to them alone. I am arguing that an entrenched ocular epistemology, focus on the visual aspects of racism, misses the fact that racisms thrive on the quest for a correspondence between the physically patent and the psychologically latent, between the manifest and the hidden, and that "proof" of the non-correspondence between the two (a preoccupation of those anti-racist scholars who have attempted to show that head size and intelligence, body type and sexual disposition bear no correlation) can do little to undermine racisms' truth-claims or to show how they can be undone. As I state in the paper, "the ambiguity of those sets of relationships

between the somatic and the inner self...are not slips in, or obstacles to, racial thinking but rather conditions for its proliferation and possibility."

Some of the confusion and discomfort with my emphasis on epistemology may be my own fault, in part due to the different registers in which I too loosely use the term. I am not arguing that an epistemology of race, that a theory of racial knowledge, should replace a pragmatics of how racial domination is exercised and deployed. I do agree with Richard Rorty (and thus with Uday Mehta) who chides us for imagining that solutions to social problems can be found in the rarified world of theories about knowledge. Rather, I am arguing that we attend to epistemes at two other levels: one, that we should be more reflective about the ocular epistemologies we bring to writing histories of racisms; and two, that we cannot/should not assume we know in advance what folk epistemes underwrite racial regimes of truth (a point Loïc Wacquant also suggests when he notes the "barter between folk and analytical notions" of racism).

A crucial point: to say that racism "is easy to think" is not necessarily because it is easy to see. Why it is "easy to think" may derive, as Lawrence Hirschfeld argues, from our cognitive mapping, from a more general set of principles that organize our cognitions, from a psychological essentialism that makes the mobilization of political essentialisms highly effective (see Hirschfeld 1996, forthcoming; Stoler forthcoming; Hacking forthcoming; Dominguez forthcoming). Or the relationship between the visual and non-visual in racial thinking, as I have argued, may gain its force from another source: namely, from the political effectiveness of a system of social classification that appears fixed, permanent, and common sense while it remains mobile, porous, and pliable. Racial systems combine elements of fixity and fluidity in ways that make them both resilient and impervious to empirical, experiential counterclaims. As Uday Mehta so well puts it, "the biological and somatic conception of race is, if not totally unsustainable, at least fraught with severely disabling ambiguities." And again later in his comments, "Behind the feint of somatic fixity [racisms] all rely on the selective deployment of the shifting vagaries of culture and history." Whatever the case, how people imagine race to be secured should not be assumed, but rather the subject of sustained analysis.

To return to an earlier point: why harp on this originary bent in the historiography on race? Why not refer to those who have, like Virginia Dominguez, challenged the key cultural assumptions on which racisms are based? And why the selections and the omissions I have made? Quite simply, my critique is not meant to be comprehensive nor to cover the entire range of scholarship on race. My intervention, first, derives from my own engagement in colonial studies over the last decade and targets more specifically a postcolonial scholarship that assumes what colonial racism looked like in the interests of describing a postcolonial predicament today. Second, in teaching

for some ten years on the contemporary and colonial contours of racism, I have been struck by how many accounts in sociology and in cultural studies subscribe to a unexamined notion of nineteenth century racism, a racism posited as a more straightforward, more brutal, more physiologically based expression—in short, the essence of racism in its “purer” form. I am not arguing, as David Roediger suggests, that either Paul Gilroy or Howard Winant subscribe to a biological notion of *contemporary* racism, but rather that their accounts of what cultural racism looks like today are predicated on a fundamental difference between today’s nuanced variants and an earlier notion of race that Winant specifically describes as one conceived “as an essence, a natural phenomenon, whose meaning was fixed, as constant as a southern star” (Winant 1994, p. 13). Perhaps I have painted the canvas too broadly, but the more crucial point I want to make stands; if racisms have never been based on somatics alone nor on a notion of fixed essence, then progressive scholarship committed to showing the protean features of racial taxonomies does little to subvert the logic of racisms since that logic itself takes the plasticity and substitutability of racial essences as a defining feature of it.

But again, why does it matter if we incorrectly caricature racisms in the past as long as we deal squarely with subverting those racisms that persist today? Again let me be clear. I think that the ways in which we rewrite the past matter very much. Originary histories are not just about origins, tout court. They never have been and are not now. Histories of racial origins like those of nationalist origin make claims on property entitlements, citizenship rights, access to medicine, education, and welfare. Anyone arguing that originary histories are beside the contemporary political point is not reading the daily press. To suggest that liberalism is the “source” of racism is not only an argument about the past but about what subversive strategies are possible within liberalism today. Histories arguing that racism reached its florescence as a scientific doctrine are not innocuous documents: these are historical accounts that justify solutions in the present and blueprints for the future. “Good guy” scholars disproving the one-to-one correspondence between race and intelligence, between physical type and cognitive endowment, advocated by *The Bell Curve* “bad guys,” are still operating on the latter’s epistemic turf, are still subscribing to a notion that good science can relegate race to its proper status as a non-biological, non-scientific and thus non-valid social category.

Some might argue that just because racism is conceived to originate with capitalism, that need not say anything about the contemporary capitalist institutions and practices in which it is lodged and which of those reproduce its conditions of proliferation today. But I am not sure this is the case. Loïc Wacquant makes a point that Foucault made in his lectures on state racisms and with which I strongly agree; racisms have not and are not now confined to a Euro-American form. Nor are racist states only capitalist ones. Racial discourses that posit an “internal enemy” within and a state that murders its

own citizens in the name of protecting them from those internal enemies and themselves, are part of the technologies of rule of socialist and fascist states as well. We not only miss the relationship between state consolidation and racism by positing capitalism alone as the “culprit,” but we forfeit access to an analytic point of entry: examination of how racisms are embedded in a range of state building projects in ways that make them taxonomically distinct but structurally similar in varied time and space.

David Roediger’s suggestion that I should look more carefully at the origins debate in relationship to Marxism and to liberal appropriations of Marxist positions is an good one. Those of us schooled in the 1970s in political economy cannot forget that anti-apartheid activism was a time in which the power relations of racism were seen as a “function” of class and thus not deserving of analysis in itself. More than a huge cottage industry of scholarship came out of that observation. The notion that racial struggles were subsets of class struggles shaped what (some) well-meaning scholars and (some) activists believed were viable and appropriate tactics for anti-racist scholarship and political strategy.

The call to “retire racism from the armamentarium of the social sciences” was as utopian in the many other historical moments social scientists advocated it as it is in Loïc Wacquant’s call for it now. To say that race is constructed is not to say that it is not real. The notion that by a scholarly slight of hand we can erase racism from our analytic discourse would be to miss the tactical political practices in which racial discourse may be mobilized as a technology of the state at one moment and be used against the state at another. Race is not a salient biological category but it is a potent political one.

Some people argue that race is easy to think because it is easy to grasp. But I would suggest a somewhat different formulation. Race is easy to think because it is both too easy and too hard to grasp, because it builds on a positivistic ocular epistemology of the visible as well as intangible qualities of cultural competence, moral tendencies and psychological sensibility that are not knowable in these terms, that are nonvisible, nonverifiable, subject to constant substitution and hard to grasp.

A final point about comparative histories of racism about which my respondents and I firmly agree. Virginia Dominguez defends the pursuit of research “of other places and other times” as “one of the ways we continue to fuel our anti-racist interventions in the scholarly arena.” As Loïc Wacquant notes, it is not only that social scientists have accepted a “preconstructed object,” they have also relegated “*one particular national reconstruction of ‘race,’*” that evolved by the United States in the twentieth century, as the basic yardstick by which to measure all instances of ethnoracial subordination and inequality.” David Roediger, similarly calls for a “more explicit discussion of the tensions between scholarship placing racism’s origins and reproduction within the context of global imperialism and that emphasizing slavery and other

social inequalities in the Americas and often specifically in the United States." And it is Uday Mehta's extended discussion of liberalism and empire that directly answers Roediger's call.¹

The issue here is not really one of "comparison" so much as a rethinking of the very units of analysis on which histories of racisms have thrived.² It is not only that social scientists have accepted "one particular national reconstruction of 'race'"—that prevalent in the United States. In assuming that the language of class has dictated the language of race, scholars have, by and large, rarely questioned how often an imperial language of race may have provided a template for a metropolitan language of class and worked the other way around.³ A research strategy that can unbracket colonial and metropolitan politics, and therefore colonial and metropolitan historiographies, can pose a new set of questions that situates the racial formations that characterized U.S. and South African histories not as cases *in extremis*, but rather as formations forged in racial genealogies of much wider breadth. Race may thus emerge as a key not only to the making of a nineteenth-century U.S. working-class labor movement as David Roediger so persuasively argues, but also as central to the making of European bourgeois sensibilities rather than as a late nineteenth century addition to them. The point is *not* to find yet another site of origin but to understand the broad and contradictory investments that tie distinctions of human quality to distinctions of human kind.

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NOTES

1. See Mehta (1997) where he first sets out the argument of his forthcoming book *Empire and Liberalism*.
2. On the consequences of remaining within bracketed and nationalist metropolitan and colonial historiographies see Stoler and Cooper (1997).
3. On this point see Stoler (1995, Ch. 4) and Thorne (1997).

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