

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" 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

Political Power and Social Theory, Volume 11, pages 221-234.

Copyright © 1997 by JAI Press Inc.

All rights of reproduction in any form reserved.

ISBN: 0-7623-0242-9

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 way 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."⁹ Doxical 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 preciousness 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).

REFERENCES

- Andrews, G.R. 1991. *Blacks and Whites in São Paulo, Brazil, 1888-1988*. Madison: University of Wisconsin Press.
- Banton, M. 1979. "Analytical and Folk Concepts of Race and Ethnicity." *Ethnic and Racial Studies* 2(2): 127-138.
- . 1989. *Racial Theories*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Bourdieu, P. 1980. "Le mort saisit le vif: les relations entre l'histoire incorporée et l'histoire réifiée." *Actes de la recherche en sciences sociales* 32-33(April-June): 3-14.
- . 1989. "Social Space and Symbolic Power." *Sociological Theory* 7(1): 18-26.
- . Forthcoming. *Méditations pascaliennes*. Paris: Editions du Seuil.
- Brenner, N. 1994. "Foucault's New Functionalism." *Theory and Society* 23(3): 679-710.
- Cope, R.D. 1994. *The Limits of Racial Domination: Plebeian Society in Colonial Mexico City, 1660-1772*. Madison: University of Wisconsin Press.
- Davis, F.J. 1991. *Who is Black? One Nation's Rule*. University Park: Pennsylvania State University.
- Dikötter, F. 1992. *The Discourse of Race in Modern China*. Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press.
- Dominguez, V. 1991. *White by Definition*. New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press.
- Duster, T. 1996. "The Prism of Heritability and the Sociology of Knowledge." Pp. 119-130 in *Naked Science*, edited by L. Nader. New York: Routledge.
- Foucault, M. 1971. *L'ordre du discours*. Paris: Gallimard.
- . 1980. *Power/Knowledge*. New York: Pantheon.
- . [signed as M. Florence]. 1984. "Foucault." In *Dictionnaire des philosophes*, Vol. 1, edited by D. Huisman. Paris: PUF (reprinted in *Dits et écrits*, Vol. 4, p. 635).
- . 1989. "Du gouvernement des vivants." In *Résumé des cours, 1970-1982*. Paris: Julliard.
- . 1994 [1981]. "L'intellectuel et les pouvoirs." In *Dits et écrits*, Vol. 4. Paris: Editions Gallimard.
- Gates, H.L., Jr. 1993. "'Race' as the Trope of the World." Pp. 4-13 in *"Race," Writing, and Difference*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Greenberg, S.B. 1980. *Race and State in Capitalist Development: Comparative Perspectives*. New Haven, CT: Yale University Press.
- Gregory, S. and R. Sanjek, eds. 1995. *Race*. New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press.

- Hellwig, D.J. 1992. *African-American Reflections on Brazilian Racial Paradise*. Philadelphia, PA: Temple University Press.
- Lopez, I.H. 1996. *White by Law*. New York: New York University Press.
- MacDougall, H. 1982. *Racial Myths in English History: Trojans, Teutons, and Anglo-Saxons*. Montreal: Harvest.
- McKee, J. 1993. *Sociology and the Race Problem: The Failure of a Perspective*. Urbana: University of Illinois Press.
- Miles, R. 1989. *Racism* (pp. 41-68). London: Routledge.
- . 1993. "The Civilisation and Racialisation of the Interior." Pp. 80-108 in *Racism after "Race Relation"*. London: Routledge.
- Phizacklea, A. 1988. "A Sociology of Migration or 'Race Relations'? A View from Britain." *Current Sociology* 32(3): 199-218.
- Price, J. 1966. "A History of the Outcaste: Untouchability in Japan." Pp. 6-30 in *Japan's Invisible Race: Caste in Culture and Personality*, edited by G. DeVos and H. Wagatsuma. Berkeley: University of California Press.
- Sabouret, J-F. 1980. *L'autre Japon: les burakumin*. Paris: Masro.
- Schiebinger, L. 1993. *Nature's Body: Gender in the Making of Modern Science*. Boston: Beacon Press.
- Stoler, A.L. 1995. *Race and the Education of Desire: Foucault's "History of Sexuality" and the Colonial Order of Things*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press.
- Wacquant, L.J.D. 1989. "The Puzzle of Race and Class to American Society and Social Science." *Benjamin E. Mays Monographs* 2(1): 7-20.
- . 1992. "Towards a Denationalized Sociology of 'Racism' in the Advanced Societies." Paper presented at the "Racism and the Transformation of Advanced Societies: Lessons from Western Europe" plenary session, American Sociological Association annual meeting, Pittsburgh, August.
- Wagley, C. 1965. "On the Concept of Social Race in the Americas." Pp. 531-545 in *Contemporary Cultures and Societies in Latin America*, edited by D.B. Heath and R.N. Adams. New York: Random House.
- Weber, M. 1948. *The Methodology of the Social Sciences*. New York: Free Press.
- Williamson, J. 1980. *The New People: Miscegenation and Mulattos in the United States*. New York: New York University Press.
- Winant, H. 1994. "Racial Formation and Hegemony: Global and Local Developments." In *Racism, Identity, Ethnicity*, edited by A. Rattansi and S. Westwood. Oxford: Basil Blackwell.
- Wittgenstein, L. 1977. *Vermischte Bemerkungen*. Frankfurt: Suhrkamp Verlag.

THE ESSENTIAL AMBIGUITIES OF RACE AND RACISM

Uday Singh Mehta

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

Political Power and Social Theory, Volume 11, pages 235-246.

Copyright © 1997 by JAI Press Inc.

All rights of reproduction in any form reserved.

ISBN: 0-7623-0242-9