



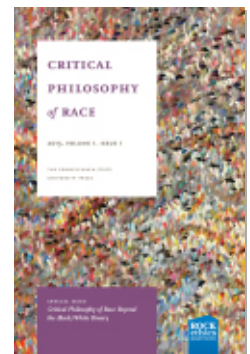
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Susanne Lettow

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**BOOK REVIEW**

*Racism and Modernity:  
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Concepts of freedom and equality have been connected to forms of racist exclusion throughout modernity. From early modernity to the present, different forms of racism have been invented and enacted that, despite their heterogeneity, can be understood as modes of “negative socialization.” This concept was coined by the German sociologist Wulf D. Hund, who is honored with this edited volume. It means that in modern societies, social coherence relies on negative constructions of racial “others”: “inclusion is organized through exclusion” (2). From this perspective, the seventeen essays of the volume analyze “the connection between racism and modernity” in three periods: the “constitution phase” from the fifteenth to seventeenth centuries, the “systematization phase” of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, and a “popularization phase” from the late nineteenth century to the present. Although one can doubt the linear development this periodization suggests, the essays of the volume provide interesting insights. The case studies, which come from diverse disciplines, make it possible to get an idea about the structural similarity as well as differences between the racist ideas and practices in modernity.

In the first part, Max Hering Torres and Gary Taylor inquire into the relation of racism to phantasms of lineage. Hering Torres reconstructs the

“development and conceptual variability” of the concept of the “purity of blood” (7) in early modern Spain. He argues that this concept should be analyzed by distinguishing “three layers of meaning”: (a) it functioned as a juridical norm, (b) it “became a social category,” and (c) it “turned into a discursive category” (ibid.). Torres argues that the juridical norm that was first introduced in 1449 as *Sentencia-Estatuto* against “converts of Jewish lineage” developed into a “system of social segregation” (16) in the sixteenth century based on genealogical investigations. “As a discursive category, purity of blood was mainly founded on theological ideas” (16). In the course of the seventeenth century, however, these became mingled with medical ideas and concepts (23), which lead to a “somatization of genealogical difference” (28). The concept of “purity of blood” however did not only change during these centuries but also, when it was transposed to the situation in Spanish America. It then, became the cornerstone of the *castas*-system regulating social and legal entitlements.

Gary Taylor in his chapter on “early modern King Kongs and Calibans” focuses on the human-animal divide in the story of an ape raping a white woman which he traces back to Antonio de Torquemada’s *Jardin des Flores Curiosas* (1570). He shows that the anecdote Torquemada reports was told and retold throughout the centuries and that among others Shakespeare drew some inspiration from it in *The Tempest*. In addition, Taylor argues that the “emotional core of the narrative is the distant, difficult, dangerous ape” (49), not the woman or black males. “Modern racism,” he concludes, “can be interpreted, in part as a defensive reaction to the early modern discovery of the great apes” (ibid.).

The chapters of part 2 of the volume deal with racism in early modern political philosophy (Charles W. Mills, Robert Bernasconi, Werner Goldschmidt), the politics of slavery and race in the nineteenth century (David R. Roediger, Simone Beate Borgstede), and the invention of a scientific understanding of race in physical anthropology (Sabine Ritter, Iris Wigger, Audrey Smedley, Antje Kühnast). Mills focuses on Hobbes’s “racial contract,” arguing that he transposes Aristotelian ideas about “natural subpersons” into the modern social contract-theory. Hobbes’s political philosophy thus is not egalitarian. Rather it legitimizes domination of those who are deemed incapable of constituting a state. In a similar way, the liberal political philosophy of John Locke is closely connected to “proto-racist” ideas as Robert Bernasconi shows. Although Locke did not use modern race categories in his writings on the constitution of Carolina or in the Two

Treatises when he mused over the status of “Negro slaves,” he contributed to what Bernasconi calls racism as “a system” (68, 80). The notion of “proto-racism,” as introduced here by Bernasconi, is meant to overcome the narrow focus of the history of ideas and refocus on social structures.

The chapters of Goldschmidt and Roediger also provide important insights because of their focus on the intersectionality of “race.” While Goldschmidt explores the intersections of “class” and “race” in French historiography and political philosophy in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, Roediger analyzes the management literature of U.S. planters from the nineteenth century. Roediger discusses two dimensions of the literature: first, the “management of land,” where justifications of slavery and of the dispossession of Indians converged, and second, the intersection of race and gender with regard to the “management of reproduction” and reproductive labor.

In the European context, physical anthropology and the life sciences played a crucial role for the race discourse of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Ritter, Wigger, Kühnast, and Smedley therefore deal with scientific articulations of racism. Ritter explores the entanglement of egalitarian and hierarchical assumptions in the “racial systematics” of Johann Friedrich Blumenbach. She argues that Blumenbach’s hierarchies articulated in aesthetic terms were part of the racial discourse of the period. Wigger, in her contribution on Robert Knox and the “racialization of the Irish,” focuses on the interplay of science and politics in the nineteenth century, noting that when Knox argued that the “Celtic race of Ireland,” because of its inferiority, “must be forced from the soil” (quoted after Wigger, 141), he made political implications of his race theory explicit. In addition, the racial anthropology of the Irish played a central role in the class conflicts within Victorian Britain as it contributed to the “negative societalization” (145) of the British. Kühnast in her chapter on German physical anthropology in the nineteenth century focuses on the “scientific abuse of Australian aboriginal human remains.” Smedley, however, makes an argument about the meaning of science and philosophy for modern race discourse. She argues that race was first a “folk concept” that was only transformed into a scientific concept in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries in order to rationalize an already established system of inequality and dominance.

The third section is the most heterogeneous part of the volume. From different disciplinary and geographic perspectives, the contributions included here address forms of racism and anti-Semitism (Micha Brumlik,

Lars Lambrecht) and the diverse cultural politics of racism with regard to Australian literature at the begin at the twentieth century (Stefanie Affeldt), to blackface minstrelsy in nineteenth- and early-twentieth-century Great Britain (Michael Pickering), trademark stereotyping (Malte Hinrichsen), and the construction of AIDS and African sexuality in German quality print media (Nadine Anumba). Brumlik, highlights in his essay the distinction between “a church-bound anti-Judaism and a modern racial anti-Semitism” (195) and introduces seven distinct configurations of Jew-enmity (197). Historically they span from the Roman empire and forms of Jew-enmity in classical pagan writings to radical Islamism. Given the fact that one of Brumlik’s main arguments is that “Jew-enmity is a social phenomenon and, therefore can only explained with reference to social causes” (195), this construction of a linear development certainly needs more differentiation and analysis of the different social, cultural, political, and cultural causes and constellations.

The analyses of Affeldt, Pickering, Hinrichsen, and Anumba all focus on the cultural articulations of racism. Affeldt, for example, shows that the “invasion novels” published in Australia in the decades before the First World War combined different “complexes of racist argumentation” that linked issues of race, class, and gender. Despite their different and sometimes opposing orientations, they contributed to the constitution of “a united ‘White Australia’ facing the external Asian enemies” (233). The historical continuity of racist stereotypes is explored in Hinrichsen’s analysis on how race categories persist in advertising and in Anumba’s reconstruction of images of African sexuality in German HIV/AIDS discourse. Anumba, who has explored quality press publication from the last thirty years, shows that African sexuality is constructed around three features: “black African’s sexuality is depicted as invariably heterosexual” (273), as “excessively promiscuous” (*ibid.*), and as patriarchal, which means that African women are constructed as “the passionless and completely powerless victims of African men” (274). These images, Anumba concludes, “reproduce constructions of a savage African sexuality” of modern scientific racism and even ancient mythology (288).

Although there are strong thematic connections between different chapters, what is missing is a systematization of the heterogeneous aspects of modern racism presented in the volume. In addition, critical discussion on the hegemony of cultural analysis—in particular, in the third section on twentieth-century racism—in contrast to political, social,

and economic perspectives would have been interesting. The strength of the volume, however, lies in its broad historical horizon and its collection of diverse case studies that shed light on the history of racism in modernity. Many chapters highlight the importance of intersectional critiques of race, class, and gender and thereby give inspiration for further inquiries in this direction.

SUSANNE LETTOW