

Ducháček, Milan a kolektiv: Za rovnocennost evropských plemen. Československá antropologie tváří v tvář rasismu a nacismu [For the Equality of European Races. Czechoslovak Anthropology Toe-to-Toe with Racism and Nazism].

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This volume reflects current shifts in Czech historiography, which is gradually moving from a state of denial regarding the presence of scientific racism in Czech science toward a critical reconsideration of the influence of race-informed arguments on discriminatory policies. Ducháček and his team present the sociological biographies of interwar scholars by exploring the historical significance of the anthology “Za rovnocennost evropských plemen” (*For the equality of European races*, 1934), the aim of which was to expose German racial theory. The wording “toe-to-toe with racism and Nazism” in the subtitle promises critical narration with emphasis on the agency of Czechoslovak anthropology in the race-informed political order of the time. However, the choice to focus on a book described as “endemic without wider international appeal” (p. 263) for an examination of Czechoslovak natural and social sciences in the context of the issue of race seems questionable.

Published in 1934, *For the equality of European races* was one of many manifestations of methodological (trans)nationalism.¹ Racial marginalization of Slavs was characterized by interwar experts as an example of poisoning international science with the idea of a Nordic race. To construct a “proper” idea of race, representatives of the biological and social sciences consistently contrasted “nature” with “society.” While otherness was conceptualized as the result of multifaceted self-isolation among “primitives,” belonging to the “white” world appeared monolithic in its ongoing process of racial intermixture. If race science and scientific racism as one of its most extreme implications embody methodological (trans)nationalism, its critical historicization calls for methodological cosmopolitanism.²

Three interrelated presuppositions underpin a cosmopolitan response to the task of historicizing race science: (1) an extended timeline detailing the political, social

¹ Beck, Ulrich: Rooted Cosmopolitanism: Emerging from a Rivalry of Distinctions. In: Beck, Ulrich/Sznaider, Nathan/Winter, Nathan (eds): *Global America? The Cultural Consequences of Globalization*. Liverpool, 2004, 15-19.

² *Ibid.*

and cultural echoes of ideas and practices; (2) a redefinition of geopolitical settings for knowledge production that connects localism and cosmopolitanism in retelling the story of race science; and (3) a revision of previous historicizations of race science that emancipates them from the binary contradistinctions imposed by race science itself. With a focus on *For the equality of European races*, Ducháček's team offers a retrospective ending with the start of World War II, a geographical locus defined by the juxtaposition of Czechs and Germans, and a set of binary contrasts resulting from this temporality and locality. The various centrifugal movements of the contributors starting from the focus on *For the equality of European races* illustrate the tensions in overcoming methodological nationalism.

The first two chapters written by Marketa Křížová and Michal Šimůnek present scholars who were not among the contributors to *For the equality of European races* – namely Aleš Hrdlička, the “parental” figure of Czech anthropology who nevertheless did not engage in the pre-war campaigns against Nazi race science, and Ignaz Zollschan, a prominent critic of German racism. These two consecutive chapters present a highly controversial distinction between experts who had and had not joined the fight against racism. This distinction becomes a trap of methodological nationalism, described in crystal-clear fashion by Ulrich Beck as the separation into influencer nations and influenced nations,³ which significantly limits historical sensitivity and sociological imagination.

In Hrdlička's absence from the public campaigns against German racism, Křížová recognizes the restrained attitude typical of experts on both sides of the ocean (p. 67), and assumes Hrdlička's animosity toward Franz Boas to represent a further driving force (ibid.). In doing so, however, she overlooks the multiple conflicts accompanying Hrdlička's involvement in Czechoslovak nation building, which had begun in the 1900s. Between 1933 and 1938, the calls of American donors such as the Rockefeller Foundation to achieve “race balance” in Czechoslovakia aimed to bring together Czechs and ethnic Germans. This shift in international relationships placed Hrdlička, whose dependence on donors had increased after the government cut the budget for his work in late 1933,⁴ in a position to criticize his Czech colleagues for their “racial imbalance.”⁵ But it was more than just these external circumstances that minimized Hrdlička's chances of participating in the campaigns. The ideological content of the anti-German actions themselves prompted him and his colleagues, including Boas, to distance themselves.⁶ Hence, the efforts by Earnest Hooton mentioned by Křížová culminated in a proposal to promote direct racial intermixture of Germans who shared the ideals regarding the Aryan race by means of their forced resettlement after the end of the war.⁷ The role of Hrdlička's relationships with his

³ *Ibid.* 20.

⁴ *Hrdlička*, Aleš: Letter to Boas, 04/26/1933. National Anthropological Archive, Washington DC, Aleš Hrdlička Fond, box 14, folder Boas, Franz III 1930-42.

⁵ *Hrdlička*, Aleš: Letter to Bohumil Němec, 10.01.1934. National Anthropological Archive, Washington DC, Aleš Hrdlička Fond, box 8, folder American Institute in Prague.

⁶ *Boas*, Franz: Letter to Hrdlička, 20.04.1942. National Anthropological Archive, Washington DC, Aleš Hrdlička Fond, box 14, folder Boas, Franz III, 1930-42.

⁷ *Hooton*, Earnest: 16.04.1942: A synthetic race of Germans proposed. National Anthro-

close colleagues—including Harry Shapiro, Arthur Keith, and Soviet anthropologists who were vocal critics of German racial science—seems to be in question.

Šimůnek examines Ignaz Zollschan's persistent but unsuccessful attempts to advance the project of an inter-country union of scientists in the fight against German racism. A detailed documentation of Zollschan's communication with experts and authorities provides a number of new insights into how long-term contests between different (trans)national camps of anthropologists were transformed with the radicalization of the political situation after 1933. Whereas Šimůnek's narration ends with the Munich Pact, Zollschan continued to struggle thereafter. In 1943, the Royal Anthropological Institute of Great Britain and Ireland established the Committee on Race and Racialism, inviting Zollschan to become one of its key experts.⁸ Supported by Zollschan, members of the Beneš government in exile prepared their own memorandum, which reproduced many of the statements in *For the equality of European races*. By focusing on his public efforts to attract attention to increasing racism, Šimůnek relegates Zollschan's actual arguments against racism to the margins. An examination of Zollschan's lecture on "How to Combat Racial Philosophy" presented to the Committee on Race and Racialism⁹ sheds light on his understanding of German racism, which aligned with the methodological nationalism of the Czechoslovak publication in many regards. The question whether this stance was one of the driving forces behind the sidelining of the positions of Zollschan and other Czech experts in the Committee's activities requires further investigation.

Two contributions by representatives of a younger generation of Czech historians, Filip Herza and Vojtěch Pojar, can be read as attempts to problematize the participation of scholars in interwar anti-racism campaigns by contextualizing their personal stories in the history of scientific networks. Both historians remain under the influence of the binary opposition Czech vs. German as one of their main explanatory schemes.

Dedicated to Vojtěch Suk's controversial role in Czechoslovak anthropology, Herza's contribution, which coincides closely with my own work, ends with a very unexpected and old-fashioned way of criticizing racist approaches with the "Nazi" label: "Czechoslovak anthropology shared its political and epistemological positions with its German opponent" (p. 180).

Vojtěch Pojar focuses on the international reception of *For the equality of European races*, explaining its vicissitudes by way of Maurizio Meloni's categorization of interwar genetics based on two criteria—namely, ideological affiliation (right or left) and explanations for heredity (Lamarckism or Mendelism).¹⁰ According to

pological Archive, Washington DC, Aleš Hrdlička Fond, box 14, folder Boas, Franz III, 1930-42.

⁸ Zollschan, Ignaz: Letter to RAI. 30.03.1943. Archive of the Royal Anthropological Institute of Great Britain and Ireland, London, Papers on race and race relations.

⁹ Zollschan, Ignaz: How to Combat Racial Philosophy, 23.02.1943. Archive of the Royal Anthropological Institute of Great Britain and Ireland, London, Papers on race and race relations.

¹⁰ Meloni, Maurizio: Political Biology: Science and Social Values in Human Heredity from Eugenics to Epigenetics. London, 2016.

Pojar, the positive reactions to the volume by Božo Škerlj (Yugoslavia) and Viktor Lebzelter (Austria) were determined by their belonging to the same camp of leftist Mendelians, and even to the same network (p. 187). Such uncritical acceptance of a simplistic historicization of genetics conflicts with the blurred theoretical affiliations in the views of interwar scholars—the key to avoiding a contest of listing racist arguments like in the case of Škerlj: “I am for free competition between races, although [...] I could not change my opinion about the Jews, [...] and I would not allow these people free competition with our European races.”¹¹ An even more complicated picture regarding the Yugoslav scholar’s affiliation can be found in his writings produced during World War II. In late autumn 1939, Škerlj published an article richly illustrated with photographs of different types of Yugoslavs to demonstrate their racial connection to Italians in *La Difesa Della Razza* (*The defence of the race*).¹² The unproblematic restoration of Škerlj’s academic credentials after 1945 mentioned by Pojar can also be explained with his flexibility in employing Mendelian and Lamarckian approaches: Škerlj did not oppose Lysenkoism, but adapted its explanation as one of the driving forces behind evolution.

The rest of the book feels like a return to the long tradition of liberating Czech eugenics and anthropology from the stigma of unscrupulous science by contrasting, at least in part, the Czechs with the Germans. This argument develops hand in hand with a simplistic understanding of racism as a war for racial purity rather than as the racism of the abnormal.

Regarding the position of Karel Weigner, the editor of *For the equality of European races*, Lenka Ovčáčková compares his academic trajectory to that of Ernest Haeckel, the famous German biologist. The complicated relationship between Weigner and materialist monism represents the central motif in Ovčáčková’s narration, leading her to conclude that Weigner emancipated himself from the dangerous influence of German colleagues and developed a harmless, if somewhat exaggerated, version of positive eugenics based on recognition of the special role of physical exercise (p. 153).

In a very similar manner, Věra Dvořáčková and Milan Ducháček contrast Ladislav Haškovec’s concept of eugenics, which was ostensibly free of racial influences (p. 209), with that of his colleagues Vladislav Růžička and Artur Brožek, which is described as “corrupted” by the German eugenic imagination (p. 214). Neither the issue of intersectionality between race and disability nor the signs of a critical response by Haškovec to his misbehaving colleagues are discussed.

In his chapter on the three social scholars who contributed to *For the equality of European races*, Ducháček further contrasts the social sciences with biology in their different vulnerabilities to the threat of scientific racism. In keeping with this cliché, he explains the inconsistency of the biological critique in *For the equality of*

¹¹ Škerlj, Božo: Letter to Jindřich Matiegka, 03.11.1934. Archive of the Group of Anthropology, Department of Biology, Biotechnical Faculty, University of Ljubljana, Fond of Božo Škerlj.

¹² Škerlj, Božo: A fra Yugoslavia e Italia [Between Yugoslavia and Italy]. In *La Difesa Della Razza III* (November 1939) 47-51.

European races with a lack of interdisciplinary connection to the social sciences. One of numerous examples of how such a view elides the various manifestations of scientific racism is the interpretation of Karel Chotek's position considering self-isolated groups to be racially "pure" as an anti-racist argument rather than a form of racialization (p. 260).

In its many contradictions, the collection edited by Ducháček is a significant historical document, the reading of which contributes at the very least to an understanding of what hinders the critical revision of race science.