The Genealogical Scheme: Race or Culture?

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I am honoured to have been asked to contribute, together with my long time friend and colleague David Theo Goldberg, a presentation for the launching ceremony of the new online journal *Trans-scripts*, created by students from the Schools of Humanities and the Social Sciences in this University. I am very pleased to do it, and I want first to congratulate them for this brilliant initiative. I am sure it will bring a whole range of new possibilities for inventing, reflecting, and exchanging both among the students themselves and between them and with the more seasoned scholars like us who need fresh air and fresh challenges, across campus and in relation with other Universities. I wish the journal a long and fruitful activity.

Given that the topic of the Journal's inaugural issue is "Race: Theories, Identities, Intersections, Histories, and the 'Post-Racial' Society," I thought that I could seize this occasion to summarize some working hypotheses to which I was led in the course of revising, and rectifying, what I had proposed in earlier essays concerning the relationship between nationalism and racism in modern societies, at a time when the discussion was more about the emergence of a "new racism" (also sometimes labelled "cultural racism," or even "racism without races") than about the "post-racial society" (which is sometimes identified with, sometimes distinguished from so-called "multiculturalism"). Indeed, the very articulation of all these terms is at stake, more than ever, in our discussions. They have an immediate political import, but they also call for a broader historical and discursive analysis, which was my second reason to assemble my remarks around the category of the *genealogical scheme*, thus trying to connect from a different angle with the question on which I teach my class this year in Critical Theory Emphasis, namely "bourgeois universality and anthropological differences."

I will organize my presentation in two parts, of unequal length, but trying to keep a certain balance of the diverse perspectives with which I am now working. I will start with relatively quick self referential indications concerning the notion of the "fictitious

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ethnicity" that I had been proposing earlier, and the use that some more recent scholars have made of it, then I will summarily discuss some "discursive models" of the genealogical scheme that I believe to be able to borrow from philosophy, literature, anthropology, and history, which hopefully will allow me in the end to add some remarks about the political relevance of this idea.

Racism, nationalism, and "fictitious ethnicity"

In a book called *Race, Nation, Class. Ambiguous Identities*, that I wrote in collaboration with Immanuel Wallerstein (each of us contributing his own chapters), published in French and then in English in 1988/1991, and in some later essays, I had embarked on analyses of what I considered, in a broad sense, to form the preliminaries of an "anthropology of the nation form" in modern times, involving at the same time a description of the model of subjectivity that could be called *homo nationalis*, and a reflection on the great institutional "equation" which governs the political in modern times: that of *nationality* and *citizenship*, providing the construction of subjects with a condition at the same time inevitable and unstable, not to say contradictory, or inevitably challenged and disrupted historically from the inside. This was supposed, in particular, to help us understand how, in the wake of the constitution of "nations" in the *bourgeois* sense (through "revolutions," "unities," and "independences" of different kinds involving a "popular" participation and consent), a certain *community-effect* was produced and maintained, where racism was not a contingent addition, but rather a necessary "internal supplement." This was not a way of simply identifying racism and nationalism, or even to pretend that, in any conjuncture, among any political "camps" in bourgeois society, rampant or aggressive racism would inevitably follow from nationalism, but rather of explaining why, when the nation-form becomes challenged and undergoes a crisis (which happens throughout its history), the development of racist ideologies and practices appears as a natural "solution" (solution which, indeed, essentially aggravates the crisis), not only at an intellectual or strategic level controlled by the state, but also at a popular and social level. In this perspective I coined the notions of "fictitious ethnicity" (which I defined as the transformation of the idea, or the ideal of the nation into a representation of "natural" community based either on race, or language, or both), and "generational connection" (suggesting in particular that the nation must find a mechanism, both institutional and imaginary, to transfer and reproduce at the political level the symbolic function that binds successive generations with one another, carrying identities and norms) (Balibar and Wallerstein, chapters 3 and 5; Balibar, *We, the People of Europe?* chapter 2). These ideas were invoked then, with qualifications and critical transformations, by several scholars, in particular feminist philosophers and anthropologists, working on the notion of *reproduction* by taking into account (and pitting against one another) both the socio-economic meaning and the biopolitical meaning of the term. This was particularly the case with Alys Eve Weinbaum in the U.S. and Rada Ivekovic in Europe. Weinbaum in her book *Wayward Reproductions* would emphasize that the "fictitious ethnicity" of the nation is in fact a genealogical or quasi-genealogical order, and that, within such an order, relationships of domination based on "race" and "gender" are mutual prerequisites (Weinbaum). Ivekovic in her book *Le sexe de la nation* (i.e. *The Nation's*

Gender, or even *The Nation's Sex*) would quote my phrase: "It is an essential aspect in nations that they configure time through instituting the *connection of generations…*,"[1] but then she would add: the connection of generations is inevitably mediated by the biopolitical processes of the reproduction of the human, or the species; and therefore, when the nation materially "institutes the connection of generations," it imposes violent forms of *partitions* and *exclusions*: some genealogies are allowed, or even prescribed, others are forbidden, destroyed, or repressed. Referring to my idea that the nation, constituting itself as a political State, nevertheless (and contradictorily) models itself on the family in order to define its internal order, she asserts that the nation, qua political institution, is not neutral, but entirely sexed, relying on a structural division of statuses for men and women, and, more than that, is an institution where the subjection of women forms the model of every other discrimination (Ivekovic 31). This brings back and renews a hypothesis that I had myself quickly enunciated in a different place: the "racist community" and the "sexist community" (or the community of *males* excluding women) are not really different, they are in fact the same "community," or rely on the same *community-effect*. However, such radical formulations – which I believe hit the right target – leave some problems unclear. There remains a deep uncertainty concerning the articulation of the nation-form and the institution of the family, or if you prefer the two "orders," public and private: is this an *analogy*, an *extension*, or an *incorporation*? And there remains a difficulty to understand the *political ambivalence* of the effects produced by concrete forms of articulation of sexual relations, race relations, or processes of "racialization," and the political institution. I am particularly thinking of highly ambivalent forms of combination of *racism* and *sexism*, both on the side of the dominant society, and the dominated or excluded groups, as were highlighted by the conflicts and struggles in the "ethnic ghettoes," such as the French *Banlieues* made famous by the 2005 uprisings. In resistances against racism and a racialized model of the nation, you witness a volatile combination of movements of women's liberation and movements for the appropriation or re-appropriation of women by males and especially by young males, for which the liberal republican state appears as a threat. We cannot ignore the ultra-violent *double-bind* in which immigrants and children of migrants are taken, with, on one side, a *prohibited genealogy*, and, on the other side, a *stigma of origin* or "ethnic-cultural descent" that is imposed on them, so that the "normalization" of family life (which in general also becomes increasingly problematic in today's society) is made an impossible goal. Such theoretical conversations and political dilemmas of the conjuncture prompted me to try and return to the general issue, through the detour of reflecting on the "genealogical scheme" itself, which seems to be at work and held in check in the vicissitudes of the nation form.

Discursive models of the genealogical scheme

I had found the expression "genealogical scheme" used by Jacques Derrida, who uses it in his book *Politics of Friendship*, when, particularly, he proposes a "deconstruction of the

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[1] This is from "*Homo nationalis*. An Anthropological Sketch of the Nation-Form," in chapter 2 of *We, the People of Europe*.

concept of the political" (or the political model of democracy, inasmuch as in our Western tradition it involves not only a reference to liberty and equality, but also to "fraternity" or "brotherhood" among the citizens). This, he suggests, cannot take the form of a "genealogy" of concepts, unless, reciprocally, the very notion of genealogy as a critical operation of the intelligence becomes questioned:

> At stake would thus be a deconstruction *of the* genealogical schema, a paradoxical deconstruction – a deconstruction, at once genealogical and a-genealogical, *of the* genealogical. It would concern, by way of a privilege granted – thus its attribute – the *genealogical*. Wherever it commands in the name of birth, of national naturalness which has never been what it *was said to be*. It would concern confidence, credit, credence, *doxa* or *eudoxia*, opinion or right opinion, the approbation given to filiation, at birth and at the origin, to generation, to familiarity of the family, to the proximity of the neighbour – to what axioms too quickly inscribe under these words. (105)

In the wake of this idea I want to try and see if I can use such a notion, "genealogical schema" or "genealogical scheme," in order to problematize the appearance, at the same time massive and enigmatic, that the political in its modern, bourgeois, typical form (namely the nation), does not so much eliminate the genealogies than displace and generalize them. I want in particular to draw a somewhat fine line of demarcation between the idea of a "genealogical scheme," and such apparently very closely related notions as a "genealogical principle" of the symbolic order (which, in France, has been particularly emphasized by post-Lacanian thinkers who are also defending a traditional notion of the law with psychoanalytic arguments, like Pierre Legendre). I think that what is at stake primarily here is not so much a "symbolic order" whose foundations should be looked for in a metapsychology of the unconscious origins of civilization, or a metaphysics of right/law which transposes theological categories into democratic representations of sovereignty, than it is made of material *institutional structures* (here I draw on Foucault and Althusser as much as Derrida). However, these are structures which, over a very long time (probably preceding and surviving the classical "nation-state"), perform a *quasi-transcendental* function, inasmuch as they make it possible to articulate the individual, or the individuality of the subject, with a representation of the *genre*, and the "generic" dimension of the "human" (note in passing, that all these terms: the genre and the gender, the generic, the genetic, the genealogy and the genealogical, share the same etymology: Latin *genus* and Greek *genos*, which is not to say that they all say the same…). And while inscribing the individual in the horizon of the genre – which you can consider as a *universalistic* operation – they also make it possible to articulate *identities* with *belongings* and *memberships* (which can be exclusive or non-exclusive, just as the articulation can be one of identification or one of rebellion and, simply, distanciation). This correlative operation does not so much invoke a universalistic horizon than it evokes a construction of the *community*, including a "community of citizens," which as we know was always the aporetic question that political philosophy and political discourse in the West tried to resolve.

With regret I do not embark here into the consideration of the many *literary examples* without which I believe that, in fact, such conceptual riddles are definitely not to be explored and understood. I will only refer to one example. There is barely no great Western novel in the 19th and 20th centuries I believe, especially a great "realist" or "modernist" novel, that is not concerned with the institutional and subjective issues of genealogy, and so to speak its permanent crisis, or its inevitable "failure" in the possible form of its more or less apparent triumph. Let me refer today only to Faulkner's *Absalom, Absalom*, published in 1936 in the middle of the New Deal Era. As you remember, the "secret" reason for the murder which destroys the Sutpen's estate and the lives of the family, which we are explained (through the complex monologues of the characters) is rooted in the traumatic actions both suffered and performed by the father, and then carried over to his two sons, Henry and Charles, remains partially undecided. It oscillates between two logics (or two "genea-logics," if I may produce this barbarism), that of *misgenation*, expressing a "code" of racial differences, and that of *incest* (since Charles is the half brother of Judith and Henry, son to Henry Sutpen from a previous marriage which he has broken when discovering that his wife was in fact "black," i.e. had inherited from her ancestors a racial stigma which in her son has become invisible, but all the more inacceptable). Given Sutpen's own conduct (which in the end leads to the "degeneracy" of his "race"), it seems nevertheless likely that the "dogma," so to speak, whose observation leads to the catastrophe, is more on the side of racial misgenation than of family incest, or even that the second is seen as a remedy against the first in a delirant manner. It is this nexus that we can try and combine with the political question: what does Faulkner's novel illustrate? Is it the idea (*postcolonial* ante literam) that the colonial situation (more precisely the situation of *internal colonization* of the American South) anticipates a bourgeois order in which, ultimately, questions of degeneracy, inherited defects, eugenics, will entirely invade problems of ancestry, descent, lineage, thus making the progeny more decisive than the ancestors? Or is it Faulkner who, in an allegoric manner, would have projected such typically *bourgeois* obsessions or fantasies into a mythical colonial past, in order to have the individual tragedy symbolize the collective one, the violent destruction of the colony itself during the Civil War appearing as the backlash of its own internal violence? In any case, the novel also offers an extraordinary treatment of the questions of articulation of "alliance" and "inheritance," and the way they are thrown into crisis when the "foreign body" par excellence, i.e. the *racial other* who had remained invisible, emerges in the middle of the generational connection.

The real work of investigation and problematization should indeed start now. I will only indicate how I believe it could become oriented. A very long, perhaps infinite, anthropological detour would be needed – this time using the name "anthropology" in its disciplinary sense, i.e. submitting our use of anthropological work to the critical supervision of the anthropologists themselves. And a no less substantial detour through the history (the genealogy of the notion of "race" in its many contradictory uses throughout modernity) would be equally necessary.

"Post-colonial" studies and anthropology have completely transformed our understanding of the way race and sex qua "differences" are articulated, and what kind of power relations, discriminations, real and imaginary subjection, violent exclusion and violent inclusion they support, in particular as it unravelled the traces that slavery and imperialism have left in the post-colonial societies, and especially influenced the *self-consciousness* or *self-representation* of nations which do not cease to perceive themselves as embodying universal values in their constitutions. Many of the analyses here were carried on by women anthropologists (I will give Ann Stoler's work as an example – see *Carnal Knowledge and Imperial Power*), but of course not only. There are however several points which remain enigmatic in my view. There is a question in particular of what makes the absolute specificity of slavery (and its social, affective, intellectual, political traces in countries like the US, where the nexus of trauma and cultural productivity is especially visible), within the general framework of colonization and empire. Conversely, this is the question of why we cannot read the history of colonization as a secular geopolitical phenomenon as a simple extension or pushing to the extreme of the phenomenon of slavery, especially chattel slavery, even if we agree that colonization and empire are the framework inside which modern slavery is justified and expands. This is in particular where such analyses as those of Claude Meillassoux in his *Anthropology of Slavery* appear to me especially valuable, because he would particularly insist on the importance of the *genealogical interruption* in the process of production of slaves. Slaves violently uprooted from Africa and transported to America have neither ancestors nor progeny, except the "products" of the operations of reproduction compared to that of domestic animals, or the "effects" of the sexual pleasure that the white masters take with their female slaves. I tend to believe – but this is only a hypothesis, not even a hypothesis, a simple guess – that the phenomenology of the presence of the "foreign body," the intruder in the middle of the bourgeois order, whose essential manifestation is the racialized body in terms of colour, derives not so much from a *coherence* of the sexual and racial dimensions, either formulated in biological or cultural languages, than from the invisible *disruption or interruption* within the genealogical scheme that slavery in particular has pushed to the extreme and installed in the very heart of the collective memory of our institutions. There would be indeed many other aspects of the transition from colonial societies, with their complex regimes of racial and sexual domination, to the so-called "hybrid" societies of the former metropolises, where the competition among men for the control, the uses, the services of women, is never to be observed independent of racial and/or cultural characterizations of the subjects, both among the dominant and the dominated, the rich and the poor, to try and decide where the genealogical scheme is operating and how it becomes intrumentalized in the very moment when its continuity, its social function, its legitimacy are increasingly difficult to ascertain.

Now the form in which the genealogical scheme was purified and emphasized in Western history was certainly above all its inventing and progressive generalizing the notion of "race" between the 16th and the 20th century, before it was officially disqualified by scientific and political institutions speaking in the name of the universal – perhaps only to continue a subterranean life under different names (such as cultural tradition or membership), and, more interestingly, becoming vindicated by individuals

and groups stigmatized as cultural or ethnic others who insist not on the elimination of the name "race," but rather on its performative reversal (for which the famous "black is beautiful" remains emblematic), because they don't want the *problem* of hereditary exclusion, generation after generation, father to son and mother to daughter, to become cancelled and occulted with the *name* that, originally, made the exclusion possible and even legitimate. This is why I also believe that we should continue to study the immensely complex history or genealogy of the category "race," and all its metonymies (blood, colour, drives, etc.), and develop our understanding of the functions that it has performed. Some of these functions are crucially *cognitive* or if you like *epistemological*, i.e. they have to do with the frameworks that were available for the humans to understand the organization of their own species, indeed always in the form of a knowledge that is inseparable from power relations. This remains very much the case today (which is perhaps one of the reasons why such substitutes of "racial relations" as "multiculturalism" are a permanent stake in scientific debates as they are indeed in political conflicts). A naturalistic paradigm of the understanding of the history, diversity, separation and hybridation of social groups has been replaced tendencially by a sociological and cultural paradigm, which does not produce the same effects of recognition and misrecognition, I am not claiming that, but which must also combine a representation of the spatial and territorial distribution of the human, with an integration of the diversity into a single history, or a single time, which the West has mainly imagined as linear progress, but which we are learning now to imagine and conceptualize in more complex, less polarized manners…. However, some of these functions are also linked to the question of understanding how anthropological hierarchies are *inherited*, or *transferred from one generation to the other*, and how these mechanisms of transference have been linked with "reproductive" institutions, and finally how they have become progressively altered in the processes of colonization and decolonization. It seems to me that the vicissitudes of the category "race" are a good guiding thread to enter into the field of theses complex transformations. In a recurrent manner, the question has been asked whether there exists really something like a "racism without races," and in which sense: whether it is a racism or a symptom of the "declining significance of race," to quote a well-known American sociologist? Which relations it has with the various forms of "identity politics," which clearly are not distributed only on one side of the existent, essentially capitalist, relations of power? How it could be possible to combine a universalistic critique of stigmatization and a critique of the homogenising functions of the anti-genealogical discourse of right and citizenship?

Perhaps we could simply suggest the following: in a *first time*, what seems to be the case is that genealogical notions (included in the form of the idea of cultural legacy, inherited identity), and more generally the genealogical scheme, which covers the whole range of notions from *genetics* to *heritage* or *patrimony*, when it is used for identifying communities or collectives, is the *remainder* of the idea of "race" after its application to the violent discrimination of colonial subjects, or descendants of slaves, or ethnic others, has been delegitimized. This is especially visible when, for example, returning to the example of the social and cultural conflicts in the modern ghettoes like the French *Banlieues* that I mentioned in the beginning, a quality like "migrant" (which is in fact a

stigma and a pejorative collective name) becomes absurdly attributed to youngsters who, because precisely they are discriminated, are seen as a threat, but who are only the children or the grand-children of the actual migrants, therefore enjoy the national citizenship for most of them, so that the quality "migrant" becomes *socially and symbolically a "hereditary" quality*. We can see here the continuation of the representation of quasi- or pseudo- collective genealogy, that I referred to as a *community-effect*. It shows that the community as such can *not* become universalised, or it has to exclude its others from the universal itself. But, if we take a second look at this absurd mechanism, we can also understand that in a sense the name race, whatever the biological justifications that were found for it, deriving from the transformation of natural history and evolutionary biology into what my master Canguilhem called a "scientific ideology," was never anything else than a *myth*, more precisely a mythical construction allowing it to imagine that reproduction, transmission, education, memory, tradition, etc., are taking place *within the limits of a community* which bears a certain recognizable "identity." Indeed this myth was anything but deprived of effectivity, which is the characteristic of all genuine mythical constructions: it was applied and "forced" into reality, so to speak. With this idea, we can finally return to the idea that there is an intrinsic link between racism and sexism that the modern nation, not only does not suppress, but permanently reinforces, while it is bound in the end to produce permanent crises in its institutional life. The concept of "race" does indeed immediately exhibit the sexed character of every social mechanism of transmission of "properties" or "capacities" from one generation to the other, and it illustrates in a sense the powerful fantasy of reproduction as an *iteration of the same*, for which paradoxically you need *at least two* individuals, who are always already dissimilar, which in turn leads to all sorts of practical and imaginary methods to prevent reproduction from generating otherness (Indeed I have in mind here Philomena Essed's extraordinary notion and investigation of what she calls "preference for sameness" as a rationale of "everyday racism"). But this "pragmatic" concept of race, also possibly transferred to culture with the genealogical scheme itself, calls probably for more, which we know has murderous effects: namely the idea that nations, or groups of nations sharing what is sometimes called a "civilization" should be considered as *endogamic communities*, where reproduction is "normally" organized as a redoubled alliance of its own members. As we know, this was never the case, neither in the colonies nor in the metropolises and it is less than ever the case today, in spite of all the powerful mechanism of resistance *both on the side of the dominant and the dominated communities* within our "globalized" societies. So reproduction was always governed not by the *application* but by the *transgression* of its own "law." What existed was not "endogamy," it was "pseudo-endogamy." But pseudo-endogamy is not the same as random or generalized hybridation. As the ideals of "post-racial" societies, "multicultural" communities, and "diasporic territories" become increasingly influential at the political level, it is imaginable – other social factors being indeed taken into account – that the genealogical scheme will be increasingly disrupted, or if you like practically deconstructed. I hardly believe that it will be entirely dispensed of, even in its transgressive or provocative uses, as long as no other notions are to be found to articulate collective history and individual reproduction….

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