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## Science, Race, Ethnicity and Identity

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BGU Marcus Family Campus

### Abstracts

(By Author)

#### **From culturally appropriate healthcare to structural competency: Reducing racism in healthcare systems**

Nadav Davidovitch (Ben-Gurion University of the Negev)

In my presentation I will discuss the Israeli case, including the recent position paper by the Israeli Ministry of Health Committee on Dealing with Racism in the Healthcare System. Medicine carries within it an inherent contradiction. On the one hand, given its general scientific inquiry into health and disease, their conditions, etiologies and treatments, it makes a claim for universality. On the other hand, contrary to its universalistic claims, it defines categories such as gender and race that have deep political and social meanings. Although inconsistent definition and use has been a chief problem with the race concept, it has historically been used as a categorization based on common hereditary traits (such as skin color) to elucidate the relationship between our ancestry and our genes. Some suggested that race as a scientific category – problematic at best and harmful at worst - should be eliminated in human genetic research. On the other hand, race as a social category is still used in a variety of research practices ranging from clinical trials and epidemiology to social sciences.

While a large body of research has been invaluable in advancing knowledge on how racism influences health inequities, it still locates the experiences of racism at the individual level. Yet the health of social groups is likely most strongly affected by structural, rather than individual, phenomena. The structural forms of racism and their relationship to health inequities remain under-studied. There is a need to deal with structural racism and the role of history, as well as other disciplines from humanities and social sciences, is crucial in order to deal with racism in the healthcare system in Israel and in other countries.

**Emerging issues in human diversity: The Italian debate**

Maria Enrica Danubio (Università de l'Aquila, Italy), Giovanni Destro-Bisol (Sapienza University, Italy)

In the aftermath of the second world war, racial concepts and terminology have been progressively abandoned by Italian anthropologists, both from a biological and cultural point of view.

A few years ago, an appeal by a group biological anthropologists for the removal of the word "race" from the Italian Constitution triggered a debate. In the course of various meetings and initiatives concerning this proposal, distinct positions emerged.

While accepting the intrinsic fallacy of the concept of human races, not all Italian anthropologists seem to be convinced that removing or replacing the term "race" with other words that are more in line with scientific evidence and not evocative of racial discrimination may be a convenient way to fight racism. Different viewpoints may be found both in the biological and the cultural fields. Only a minority of the former still advocate that maintaining the distinction in human races may turn out to be helpful, claiming their usefulness for pharmacogenetic applications. The latter pay particular attention to the political and legal implications of the use, or abandonment, of the term "race" in social contexts.

The use of "human races" as categories that describe biological and/or cultural variation continues in the media and also persists in popular discourse. The racial issue is also alive in the Italian political arena, fueled by the pervasive perception of insecurity at many levels, though the term race is not often used explicitly.

Bringing the scientific and historical discussion of human diversity, race and racism to the public is urgent due to the expected increase in migrants to Italy from disadvantaged areas worldwide.

**The psychological underpinnings of race-based categorization**

Michael Gilead (Ben-Gurion University of the Negev, Israel)

Why do people care so much about race? In this talk, I will discuss our psychological inclination towards race-based categorization as an instantiation of humans' general tendency to categorize the social world as "us" vs. "them". I will review classic social psychological research that reveals the near-instinctual nature of our "tribal psychology", and will present recent neuroscientific, developmental, and social psychological research that seem to suggest that tribal psychology may be based on our innate predispositions, and is not merely a social construction. Finally, I will ask

whether these purported innate mechanisms may be specifically tuned towards race-based classification.

### **Hominin diversity in the Middle Pleistocene and the Neandertal legacy: the Levantine case**

Israel Hershkovitz (Tel Aviv University, Israel)

The time, place and routes of early modern human (EMH) migration outside Africa are still among the hottest subjects of debate among evolutionary biologists. Anthropological, archaeological, climatological and genetic studies offer sometimes-conflicting accounts for one of the most important events in human history, the emergence of our own species and its dispersal around the World. As an important crossroad for migrations of human populations between Africa, Asia and Europe, the southern Levant has captured much attention in the efforts to follow the later phases of human evolution. EMH first appeared in Africa around 300,000 years ago (ky) (Jebel Irhoud) and arrived in the southern Levant ca. 90-115 ky, based on the hominins found in the sites of Skhul and Qafzeh, and probably Daoxian (China) at >80 ky. In addition, Neanderthals are present in the Levant between 55-75 ky at the sites of Amud, Kebara and Ein Qashish, likely having migrated to the region from Europe. The Levant has long been posited as a region of largely alternating Neanderthal and modern human occupations during the Late Pleistocene. The discovery of a *H. sapiens* cranium at Manot Cave (ca. 55 ky), along with genetic evidence suggesting an earlier presence of Neanderthals in the Levant (>80 ky), indicates that the period of occupation of the region may have overlapped between these two hominin groups more than anticipated.

The current study describes new hominin fossils discovered in Israel that may add important data regarding the origin of modern human populations and the time and routes of dispersal from the Levant into Eurasia.

### **“Aryan race” in the context of Nazi ideology**

Christopher Hutton (The University of Hong Kong)

This paper looks at the status of the notion of “Aryan race” as an intellectual and ideological formation with National Socialism. This term is often used by historians writing in English as a shorthand for Nazi racial ideology but the intellectual and political situation was much more complex. Firstly, the term *arische Rasse* was rarely used in the Nazi period. Rather one can find *Arier* (“Aryans”), *(nicht) arischer Herkunft* or *(nicht) arischer Abstammung* (“(not) of Aryan descent”) and, of course, *arisches Volk* (“Aryan people”). From 1935 onwards, *Aryan* as a strictly racial term was dropped from official usage entirely, replaced by *deutschen oder artverwandten Blutes* (“of German or cognate blood”), as well as *deutschblütig* and *deutschen Blutes*. (“of German blood”). *Arier* was nonetheless embedded in public and popular discourse, with the primary meaning of “non-Jewish” (as in terms like *Ariernachweis* “Aryan pass” and *Arisierung*

“aryanization”). The racial anthropologists insisted that arisch was not a racial term, but one derived from Indo-European linguistics. They were concerned that linguistic and racial criteria for identity would be confused. Their argument was accepted by the political authorities. For example, any university professor who expounded the concept of arische Rasse would have been dismissed. The case of the racial anthropologist Karl Saller is instructive in this regard. He lost his permission to teach in 1935, after promoting the concept of a deutsche Rasse (“German race”). Use of the term “Aryan race” in English is not entirely misleading, if it is understood to point to the place of Nazism within a wider European anti-Semitic Aryanism. But as a key to Nazi ideology it simplifies what was a highly complex and evolving intellectual and ideological landscape, one that was much closer to the contemporary US and European mainstream than this “unscientific” concept suggests.

### **Testing national and racial identities in Ethiopia: The 1959 genetic survey**

Nurit Kirsch (The Open University, Israel)

In 1959, three years after Israel and Ethiopia established diplomatic relations, Chaim Sheba, the head of Tel-Hashomer Hospital, sent an expedition of two geneticists, two physicians, and a nurse to Ethiopia. Financed by the American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee, the expedition’s goal was to study genetic characteristics among the Ethiopian tribes with a special focus on a small Jewish community called Beta Israel. The Beta Israel identified themselves, and were also viewed by others, as a distinct ethnic and religious group within the Ethiopian landscape. Out of twenty million people in Ethiopia, this community numbered an estimated 25,000-30,000 people.

The results of the aforementioned survey were published in 1962 as a series of articles in the American Journal of Physical Anthropology. In my paper I will compare the nature of the tests carried out by Israeli researchers in Ethiopia to those done in Israel. I intend to explain why the absence of genetic similarity between Beta Israel and groups belonging to the Jewish mainstream was not presented to the Israeli public nor shared with political leaders and decision-makers in Israel. This historical test-case demonstrates how political and moral concerns may shape scientific decisions and scientific activity itself.

### **The concept of the Jewish race in biological research**

Noa Sophie Kohler (Ben-Gurion University of the Negev, Israel)

The concept of “Jewish race”, which is said to have evolved from Enlightenment thought, was at no point in time clearly defined. For naturalists like Carl v. Linné and Johann Friedrich Blumenbach, Jews were part of what they called the Caucasian race. When, towards the end of the 19th century, the Jews became objects of scientific research as a separate population group, the

question whether they form a race (mixed or pure; divided into types or not) was discussed – with both Jews and non-Jews on either side.

Against the background of 18th and 19th century notions of “Jewish race” I will discuss whether contemporary studies in genetic anthropology exploring Jewish history reproduce or reintroduce such old notions despite their scientific exactness. At the same time this paper offers an answer to the question which an American anthropologist recently asked - “[...] why it is that individuals who identify as members of social groups who suffered dearly the violence of race science and eugenics in such recent memory seem so willing to embrace and even to promote a biological self-definition today” (N. Abu El-Haj, *The Genealogical Science. The search for Jewish Origins and the Politics of Epistemology*, 2012, p. 24).

One part of the answer is that traditional Jewish self-conception from early on combined the theological with the biological, best illustrated by a religious responsum last year on whether DNA testing can be used to prove Jewishness; and that secondly, separating perceived population groups is not considered as inherently racist, because it does not justify discrimination and persecution based on this identification.

### **Humans are one of the youngest species on earth**

Diethard Tautz (Max Planck Institute for Evolutionary Biology, Germany)

Distinguishing between species, races, varieties and other sub-categories has always been problematic in evolutionary and taxonomic research. Most scientists in the field have settled on saying that the category should be assigned by the scientist who has done the most work on a taxon. However, this does not work for humans and applying any of these categories to human populations is bound to be controversial. But a comparative view of what we know about speciation mechanisms in general, as well as the taxonomic distinctions among the most closely related species of humans (gorillas, chimpanzees and bonobos) should enable the identification of the boundary conditions set by historical biological processes.

My talk will include a general background on modern research on speciation and how one can approach the identification of sub-categories. One of the most important discoveries in years past is the fact that humans living today are an unusually homogeneous species, especially in comparison to their next relatives. While it is always possible to find distinguishing criteria for the subdivision of almost any population, applying this to humans is only of limited biological value.