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Beyond race?

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Abstract

While at the moment the world seems to be divided along racial lines and 'race' appears to be a central axe of social inclusion and exclusion, in this article we ask whether it is thinkable to go 'beyond race'. We want to explore the idea of going 'beyond race' in four different ways: (1) 'Beyond race' as a demographic reality when people of mixed origin form the majority of population; (2) 'Beyond race' in regard to policies that aim at combatting inequalities also along color lines, yet are no longer dependent on a notion of race. (3) 'Beyond race' in terms of political mobilizations, e.g. the possibility or desirability of anti-racist movements not grounded in identity politics and (4) 'Beyond race' as a conceptualization of race that is decoupling biology and culture, or even to stop thinking in racial categories altogether, yet without de-politicizing any marginalised group's, history and experience. We are aware that this questioning of race, and by implication of ethnicity, may be a typical hang-up of two authors based in Europe. We have invited authors from different parts of the world, and with different academic backgrounds to reflect in a commentary on the issues we raise and to explain their position.

Keywords: Race, Mixed race, Affirmative action, Identity politics, Transracialism, Critical post-racialism

Introduction

When we started thinking about this commentary series, the world was protesting against racist violence and structural racism following the death of George Floyd, yet another Black victim of police violence. At that moment, it seemed utterly out of tune with times to consider that before long in the United States, and elsewhere, race will no longer matter. Yet, in this commentaries series, this is precisely what we want to explore.

That is to say, we want to explore 'beyond race' in the light of four contemporary debates or four angles from which this question can be discussed. Firstly, this question refers to demographic changes which, due to migration and changing marriage patterns, will result in the majority of the population in some places being of mixed race. This seemingly is what is going to happen in the not so far future in continents and countries that are currently considered as having a White majority population, North America, Europe, New Zealand and Australia. Within a century, or perhaps one-and-a half, the majority in these regions are projected to be of mixed race (Kaufmann, 2018). Even though the non-White population might be highly fractured, making White individuals still forming the single largest group, these developments could result in profound

changes concerning the reading of 'race'. How will the current dominant White majority react to this change? And, as currently, 'race' is in the Anglo-Saxon world a major social demarcation line, what consequences will these developments have for how societal boundaries will be drawn? Have other regions in the world gone through similar experiences and would it be possible to draw on them? And will there emerge new social cleavages instead of race?

Secondly, we want to explore what possible implications these demographic changes may have for the discussion of public policies, like affirmative action programs for disadvantaged minority groups. These programs often target groups and minorities to which people are ascribed to based on visibility. In case the supposed beneficiaries of these policies are no longer discernible as such, because, for instance, they look White, are these programs still possible or desirable? Here, also arguments that affirmative action might reinforce racial categories could be considered.

Thirdly, we want to understand how 'beyond race' might have an effect for principles of political mobilization. Black Lives Matter (BLM) is an important example of 'identity politics': a political movement not organized solely on the basis of a shared political philosophy or shared political program, like a political party, but on the basis of shared experiences (often of injustice) due to belonging to and/or being ascribed to a specific group. Yet, one could argue that 'identity politics' based on racial (and gendered) differentiation is also at the heart of many right-wing movements. Within the left-wing political spectrum, there have been a number of debates about 'identity politics' in the recent years. What do these critiques entail and what are the implications for political mobilization against racism?

Lastly, we turn to the debate of what kind of category 'race' actually is and what going beyond race might entail analytically. In 2015 in the United States a media hype around the so-called Jenner/Dolezal affair occurred. Rachel Dolezal, who had assumed an African-American identity, was outed as White by her parents and widely condemned for identity 'fraud', while Caitlin Jenner coming out as a transgender woman, just ten days before the Dolezal story broke, was applauded for her courage to publicly acknowledge her identity as a woman. This raises theoretical questions about why transgender identities are seemingly easier accepted than transracial identities. Even more difficult, it seems, is to conceive of ourselves no longer in racial terms, that is to be 'beyond race' in the sense of transcending racial categorization altogether. Yet, this is what Williams (2020) argues is the way forward.

Yet, we also have the uncanny feeling that thinking about the category 'race' may be mainly an Anglo-Saxon concern, if not an American fixation. Already in Europe, people feel uncomfortable to speak in terms of race and use the category 'ethnicity' instead (along with its own problems). And we wonder, as scholars who are ourselves based in Europe, whether the issues we raised make sense in other parts of the world, where mixed populations have a much longer history, such as the East African coast or many South American countries, and if so, how? Moreover, in other parts of the world the main societal demarcation lines need not be along the category of 'race', but also the differentiation of society along religion or caste is often based on colorism, begging the question how this can be discussed when looking 'beyond race'. We will in the remainder of this article further explain the four ways of understanding 'beyond race'. We have

invited authors from different parts of the world, and with different academic backgrounds to reflect on the issues we raise and to explain their position.

Beyond race: demographic changes

In his book with the telling title *Whiteshift* Kaufmann (2018) discusses what population projections show is happening: the share of Whites in the population in Western countries is rapidly declining. 'In America', he writes, 'half of babies are Latino, Asian or Black and the nation as a whole is slated to become 'majority minority' in the 2040s' (Kaufmann, 2018: 31). Thus, according to him there will be a situation in which there is no longer a dominant majority group categorized by racial criteria. Kaufmann argues for Europe that a racially mixed majority group will represent a new kind of relatively stable equilibrium, following a period of 'a turbulent multicultural interregnum' (2018: 4), in which non-mixed non-Whites form the biggest block of the population. Richard Alba and Nancy Foner similarly write that in the United States: 'By 2035 it is highly likely (…) that minorities will outnumber Whites among the population under the age of forty' (2015: 42). In 2100 the British population will be 40% White, 30% mixed and 30% non-White (Kaufmann, 2018: 457). In Western Europe as a whole, the trend will be slower. According to Kaufmann, referring to a Eurostat study (Lanzieri, 2011), 'most Western European countries will be 15–40% non-White in 2061' (2018: 457). Other data confirm this trend: large Western European cities are quickly becoming majority-minority cities (https://bamproject.eu). Amsterdam and Brussels, but also London and Paris are already in this situation (Crul, 2016). The general trend seems undeniable.

This is, however, neither a new trend nor a new debate (eg. Spencer, 1995; Warren & Twine, 1997; see for the discourse about Brazil in the 1950s, Skidmore, 2003). Genetic studies have shown high levels of admixture among the US-American population self-defining as Black (Bryc et al., 2015), but also among those self-defining as White [1]. Much of this development took place in historical situations in which mixed parenthood was neither legally nor socially accepted. In Southern America even higher levels of mixing took place, resulting in the mixed category Latino used in the US. In addition, debates about mixing populations are old as well, having led to politics of fear more than once (e.g. laws against 'Rassenschande' in Nazi Germany or the 'anti-miscegenation' laws still in force in parts of the USA until 1967).

While our previous discussion may have suggested that when everyone is of mixed background, this will automatically mean the end of racial categorization, this is not evident at all. Kaufmann himself is a good example to illustrate the point. With Latino as well as Chinese grandparents he is considered White by most people. Yet, relatives of his with the same family composition are seen as Hispanic (Kaufmann, 2018: 26). This points to the continuation of race as a social categorization, even if people are of mixed origin and to the social viability of people's corporal selves or phenotype, even if their racial belonging is fuzzy.

It is open, therefore, whether this process of mixing will lead to a growing group of people classifying themselves as mixed, and hence at the end might bring about a

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[1] https://edition.cnn.com/2013/11/20/living/white-supremacist-one-drop-identity/index.html

dissolution of racial categories. It is equally possible that more people will be incorporated into the category of White, that is a broadening of the idea of who is White, which at the same time would result in the White majority keeping its majority position. These kinds of processes have occurred more often. A historical example in the United States is the social inclusion of Jews, the Irish and Italians into a generic White majority, replacing exclusive WASP ancestry in the two decades after the second World War (Kivisto, 2002: 57–62; Ignatiev, 1995). Alba and Foner believe this to be a very likely scenario: if the White category will be broadened, they expect that the new White will be more yellow, as in North America people of Asian American background are the most likely candidates to be accepted as White, because they have higher incomes than White Americans, a relatively large number of their children study at the university and they have a high rate of intermarriage with White Americans (2015: 108). Hence, when the majority is of mixed origin, Alba and Foner expect for the USA not boundary crossing (individuals of mixed ancestry, like Kaufmann, may pass and be accepted as White), nor boundary blurring (ultimately ending in the cessation of racial boundaries altogether), but boundary shifting (the White category will be broadened so as to encompass Americans of Asian ancestry).[2]

Historical examples from South America, the Caribbeans, or the Indian Ocean coastal regions, where processes of mixing have already had a long history, show that the social outcome of racial mixing can be very different. In the case of Latin America and the Caribbeans the social position of the mixed population has long been described as being within a racial continuum, as opposed to a racial binary as in the USA (England, 2010). This portrayal has changed, however, in the last decade, due to the heterogeneity of social positions and inequality in the region, but also to shifts in global discourses on racial recognition.

For the African and Indian Ocean context the term 'creolization' has been used to refer to mixing of "language, culture and identity" (Knörr & Filho 2018). Some of these developments had been ongoing already before colonial times, and underwent another change when colonialism and accompanying (academic) ideas of race reached these regions. In some areas, mixed populations, such as the Swahili at the East African coast, became fixed groups due to colonial terminology and registration, which found it difficult to come to terms with groups "tied to language and cultural affinity", instead of an "inherited identity" (Ray, 2017). These processes of racial and ethnic rigidification are far from being over, as the example of the formation of the group 'Somali Bantu' by humanitarian actors in the 1990s shows (Besteman, 2012). In other areas, such as South Africa, mixed populations were classified as "colored," as an in-between-category, setting apart this population from White as well as from Black people. Modern European naturalist science and colonial imperialism did not only create and spread the idea of race, it also led to a disappearance of non-European White identities and hence a Europeanization of Whiteness (Bonnett, 1998). In this way social hierarchies were created along the notion of race, in which deviations from the White ideal, and therefore also mixed groups, were attributed inferior positions (linked to the myth of racial purity). Hence, processes of

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[2] The distinction is from Zolberg and Woon (1999), but see also Alba (2005). Du Bois (2015 [1903]) had already predicted that the color line in the US would be Black/Non-Black instead of White/Non-White.

racial mixing can have many outcomes. We wonder what our invited discussants consider the most likely scenario for the regions they are familiar with.

Yet, the category of race is not the only category used in these discussions, as the examples from the beginning show, and the debate is about more than race only. Other overlapping, yet not synonymous terms used are minority/majority, ethnicity, migration background or even religion, resulting in a blurring of the debate and of the arguments. While 'race', for instance, is a social construct associated with physical characteristics, ethnicity is a category mainly used to refer to ideas of a shared history, group identifications, and common symbols and values. Yet, ethnicity may also be used in an essentialist way, associating a certain cultural matter with an inherited background, making it thus into a functional equivalent for 'race'. Using these terms interchangeably, as Kaufmann does, also means that it is not clear to what the author is actually referring to. When he speaks of immigration, does he refer to European migrants, who have shaped what is now the UK since thousands of years, creating a British population that is very much a mixed one in genetic as well as cultural terms (e.g. language)? Or does he mean people who 'look' differently? This blurring of categories also makes it more difficult to discern what is actually believed to change—are these demographic projections of an internally changing population with more children being born by couples from different parts of the society, or are these developments attributed to more immigration? And what is actually mixing along with these changes—social structures, power relationships, 'cultures' or group identities?

In continental Europe, the concept of race is commonly placed between inverted commas to express the author's critical distance from the term; M'Charek et al. (2014) argue that is can be seen as an 'absent present', as it is associated with race ideologies that brought amongst others Nazism to power. In countries, where people of immigrant background's data are included in the census, registration is on the basis of ethnicity, country of birth or religion, but never race. In France registration of race, but also religion or ethnicity is even forbidden. This aversion to race thinking, however, does not mean that people's visible appearance is irrelevant in Europe. While ideas of the nation are based on the assumption of a shared history, common roots, myths of descent, symbols and traditions, the typical Frenchman, Dutchman or German is in people's imagination also associated with a White person. Hence, in Europe the question is not so much 'who is categorized as White', but rather 'who belongs to the nation'? If we are correct in assuming that in the European situation, the focus is on belonging to the nation, the issue would not be who will in the future, when the majority of the citizens have immigrant backgrounds be considered White, but who will belong to the nation. One possibility is that the old idea of the nation as an exclusive community will continue to exist, but that some, like Antilleans in the Netherlands, who have a high rate (70%) of intermarriage with native Dutch (Alba & Foner, 2015: 105) and some, phenotypical White, people of mixed origin will appropriate that history and ties to the soil as their roots, and will be allowed to, whilst others, who are not recognized as belonging to the nation, are excluded. In the case of the Netherlands, for instance, this applies to people of Moroccan origin, making religion (Islam) and not race the main boundary of contemporary discourses of belonging. Is inclusion in the nation of colored minorities in Europe indeed what the future will look like? How can these new social complexities be

discussed—with the concept of 'super-diversity' (Meissner & Vertovec, 2015), which also takes into consideration the multidimensional shifts in migration patterns? And what will be the terms of inclusion—will they always be dictated by the 'dominant culture', even if it calls itself 'multi-cultural' as Hage (2000) suggests?

Beyond race: policy implications

Across the world, racial hierarchies have been combatted by affirmative action policies, intended to compensate for the suffering of earlier generations and as a way to curb racial inequality.

As Song (2020) points out, the growth of multiracial people has implications for this kind of policymaking. While historically, socio-economic disadvantages were linked more clearly to a visibility as a non-White person, a visibility that had 'marked people in terms of racial stigmas and discrimination', racial ambiguity has increasingly complicated these definitions and claims (Song, 2020:1). The author also warns, that while the claim to belong to a disadvantaged group becomes more difficult for people from a mixed family, they can nonetheless suffer from racialization, an 'embodiment of race …[influencing] how one is perceived and treated by others' (Song, 2020: 13). Thus, she concludes that calls for color-blindness are too simplistic, but that there is a possibility that societies 'unlearn racial seeing' (ibid.). Here she follows Alcoff (2006) who described the ideology of visibility as the main culprit in the production of racial categories: 'One might well argue that it is the very ideology of visibility that is the problem here; if race and gender could be divested of their purported visible attributes, they might be transformed to better reflect people's subjective sense of themselves' (p. 103). Alcoff furthermore argues that 'eliminating the visible practices of racialization' maybe necessary, but not 'sufficient for the elimination of racism' (p. 196). The ideology of visibility is also effective in cases where what is visible does not fall into clear-cut categories, and is thus perceived as dangerous: 'if there is no visible manifestation of one's declared racial or gendered identity, one encounters an insistent skepticism and an anxiety', as there might be something hidden beneath the truth (p. 7). Furthermore, mixed racial belongings create 'an irresolvable status ambiguity'—persons are cast as outsiders by those who see themselves as more 'pure' (dominant and dominated alike), and they are seen as either 'trying to pass' and/or 'they will be condemned for another kind of political opportunism' (p. 267), for instance, when they benefit from affirmative action policies.

In Brazil, discourses around the introduction of affirmative action in the 1990s are quite revealing. Even though the country was described as 'having solved its race problem' in the 1950s, as a considerable part of the population was racially mixed, awareness of inequality correlating to skin color grew from the 1960s onwards until action was demanded to curb this problem (Skidmore, 2003). The newly introduced policies of affirmative action, however, brought new problems, such as how to qualify as Black—according to appearance or by adopting the US-American one-drop-rule? These policies also created resistance against affirmative action (from the political right as well as from the left), based amongst others on the argument that 'such policies [are] inappropriate for a country as racially mixed as Brazil' (Kent & Wade, 2015, 817). Debate also arose about the question in how far these policies might reify race 'in a country that has founded much of its national identity on the idea of racial mixing' (Cicalo, 2012, 236).

At the same time that affirmative action was introduced in Brazil, it was fading out in the USA and simultaneously, while the usefulness of the mixed category was debated in Brazil, it was introduced in the census counting in the USA, Canada and Great Britain. According to Thompson (2012) this is explained by a shift towards 'multiracial multiculturalism'. Public administrators wanted to acknowledge the increasing heterogeneity of the population. A second change was the introduction of racial self-identification, explained by a growing awareness among public administrators that it is not only more difficult, with increased racial mixing for outsiders to determine a person's race, but also that it is wrong that others define for a person his or her racial identity (Thompson, 2012, 1409). Others went a step further, suggesting that the whole idea of race soon would become obsolete and be just a private issue. This argument came on the one hand from academic discussions on how categories, such as race and ethnicity, are constructed, resulting amongst others in critical Whiteness studies. When accepting categories as constructed, one can also work into the direction of discarding them, as the journal 'Race Traitor' (edited by John Garvey and Noel Ignatiev), for instance, did. On the other hand, the argument for a decreasing importance of race came from what Goldberg (2009) called 'racial neoliberalism' with its different modalities of focusing on diversity, 'post-racialism', 'color-blindness', or multiculturalism. Goldberg (2009) describes 'racial neoliberalism' as a banishment of race from the public sphere into the private one. 'Racial neoliberalism' comes with a claim of a 'post-racial' reality, which acknowledges diversity while denying racial inequality on a structural level. The implication of this depoliticization of race is of course that affirmative action policies become unnecessary and impossible. Another critique on the idea of a post-racial society was formulated by Ku et al (2019). They argue with the example of Canada, that the 'avoidance of racial terminology … focuses on removing the evidence of rather than the conditions of racism' (p. 3). While Canada is praised in public's imagination for a color-blind exceptionalism, immigrants labeled as 'visible minorities' experience structural labor market exclusion, which however is portrayed as individual responsibility, 'thereby allowing the Canadian public to maintain its façade of innocence but perpetuates "racism without racists"'. (p. 1).

Yet, it is precisely the Canadian model which Kaufmann has in mind when proposing a way how to deal with the White backlash he expects against the increasing coloring of society, expressed in the growth of anti-immigrant populist parties. To appease the mostly working-class vote for these parties, he suggests to reduce immigration numbers and to prefer those immigrants who are culturally close and not too visible. His ideal of a 'multivocal society' can be termed 'assimilation light'—while minorities are not compelled to assimilate to a state-defined national identity, their 'ethnically distinct versions' should be close to a common national identity (which again is defined by the White majority). Unsurprisingly, Kaufmann's ideas on reducing and channeling immigration met with resistance. His argument has been characterized as unbalanced (Johnston, 2020) and it was especially criticized that questions of power and inequality are missing in his reasoning (Ford, 2020, Holmwood, 2020). These are precisely the questions that feed into the discussion of race and affirmative action and the different interests social groups have in upholding or changing a current status quo. Power and inequality are also in the center of other explanations of the rise of anti-immigrant populist parties,

which attribute it to the fight for resources seen as diminishing. Kenan Malik (2018), for instance, offers an alternative analysis, which sees neo-liberal politics, austerity measures, the curbing of public services, the decline of working-class power, and the resulting precaritisation of lifecourses as a root cause for these developments. These developments also took place in regions with only little immigration, resulting in the rise of similar political movements, which likewise use immigration as a lense and political tool. At the same time, the language of culture has become increasingly important as the means to make sense of society and social relations. Many people, as a result, have come to see their marginalisation as a cultural loss.

Hence, we hope to have demonstrated that while increased racial mixing can go together with the continuation of social disadvantages along color lines, it may at the same time have major implications for both the feasibility and legitimacy of policies aimed to combat these social inequalities, like affirmative action programs. Also, the increased coloring of society may create new lines of social conflict between different groups of actors, like a White backlash, but it is by no means clear what should be the solution.

Beyond race: Beyond identity politics?

Black Lives Matter (BLM), the social movement under whose banners the protests following the death of George Floyd were organized, has been developing into a worldwide movement. BLM was founded in the US in 2013. It gave itself the mission 'to eradicate White supremacy and build local power bases that can intervene in violence inflicted on Black communities by the state and vigilantes.' (https://blacklivesmatter.com/about/). In its organizational principles BLM is an example of 'identity politics' as it is organized on the basis of a racial identification. Identity politics is associated with the 'new' social movements that emerged in the late twentieth century: the second wave women's movement, the gay movement, the disability rights movement, the indigenous rights movement, Black Power.[3] They have in common that they organize not primarily on the basis of a shared political philosophy, party affiliation or political aim, but on the shared experience (often of oppression) as members of a specific group they identify with. Moreover, identity politics pairs a notion of justice to social inclusion without erasing group identities, in contrast to a liberal notion of justice based on equality. This classical liberal view is that in the just society differences based on race, sex or religion should be transcended and be irrelevant for a person's opportunities in life. This notion of justice is criticized by Young (1990: Chapter 6), the main theorist of a politics of difference, as an ideal of assimilation. It is assimilationist, she claims, because 'the privileged groups implicitly define the standards according to which all will be measured' (p. 184), because it allows 'norms expressing the point of view and experience of privileged groups to pose as neutral and universal' (p. 185) and because those that deviate from these allegedly

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[3] The term 'identity politics' is said to stem from a statement by the Combahee River Collective, a group that was founded by Black feminists in Boston, including Barbara Smith, Chirlane McCray and Audre Lorde, to name but a few of its now famous group members. In the statement the Collective argued: 'As Black women we see Black feminism as the logical political movement to combat the manifold and simultaneous oppressions that all women of colour face. [...] This focus upon our own oppression is embodied in the concept of identity politics. We believe that the most profound and potentially the most radical politics come directly out of our own identity, as opposed to working to end somebody else's oppression.' https://www.Blackpast.org/african-american-history/combahee-river-collective-statement-1977/.

neutral standard, that is the oppressed groups, are marked as deviant 'and that often produces an internalized devaluation by members of those groups themselves' (p. 165).[4] Identity politics is, according to Young (1990: 156–191) organized around three core beliefs—that structures of oppression produce shared experiences and identities among oppressed groups; that these shared experiences can and should be used as a basis of social movements aimed at the liberation of these groups and that the liberation of the oppressed groups must come from the oppressed groups themselves.

Who could be against this? Actually, identity politics has become heavily contested (see e.g. Lilla, 2018). And parts of the critique have come from an unexpected corner; namely, from critical activists, such as Kenan Malik and Dyab Abou Jahjah. Malik believes that not race, but class is the main explanatory factor: 'African Americans, disproportionately working class and poor, are also likely to be disproportionately imprisoned and killed.' (2020). By focusing on 'White privilege' a social issue is made into an identity issue—fighting people instead of fighting unjust structures. For Abou Jahjah this reflects an essentialist approach to racism, with 'whiteness … used to claim that racism, violence, and exploitation are quintessential to "Whites" and their culture.' (2020). Therefore, both believe fighting White privilege to be a counterproductive strategy: 'The only people they are intimidating are those who care about what they are saying, thus their natural allies' (Abou Jahjah, 2020).

Abou Jahjah also reminds us, that the most dangerous and 'biggest sectarian tribalist movement nowadays in the west is the identity-obsessed far-right.' According to him this movement can only be answered by a 'broad mobilization based on solidarity and equality against racism, sexism, colonialism and other forms of inequality.' Fighting these injustices should according to Abou Jahjah, not be 'a tribal thing', even if 'we, as its victims, have more insights into how we experience it, and hence we could better testify on our victimhood.' (2020).

Other authors do not call for a complete abandoning of a focus on race, but to include it into a broader intersectional perspective, a term coined by Kimberlé Williams Crenshaw. Fraser (2000) for instance, argues to not reject a politics of recognition but to turn it into 'a *non-identitarian* politics that can remedy misrecognition without encouraging displacement and reification' and to examine its relation to economic class (p. 120). Thus, the question is in what kind of framework political mobilization concerning socio-economic inequality (but also beyond) will take place—in difference-blind social movements or in possibly more inclusive ways of identity politics? And if so, what could be its contours?

Beyond race: What does that mean for the category itself?

In 2015 Rachel Dolezal, a regional president of the US-American NAACP (National Association for the Advancement of Colored People) who had been presenting herself as a Black woman for a number of years, was 'outed' as White by her parents (Brubaker, 2016; Tuvel, 2017). Dolezal was widely condemned and ridiculed for identity 'fraud' and

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[4] Therefore, Black Panther Party forewoman Angela Davis claimed that 'We have to talk about liberating minds as well as liberating society'. (Angela Davis Quotes. (n.d.). Retrieved December 3, 2020, from BrainyQuote.com Web site: https://www.brainyquote.com/quotes/angela_davis_158900).

'cultural appropriation' and was named a 'Blackface' (Aitkinhead & Rachel, 2017) (that is a non-Black performer using make-up to represent a racial caricature of a Black person). A few days after her outing, she resigned as NAACP president. She also lost her job as assistant professor of African Studies at Eastern Washington University in Cheney (Pasha-Robinson, 2017). The reactions to Dolezal stand in sharp contrast to the reactions Caitlyn Jenner received after she, just ten days before the Dolezal story broke, appeared on the cover of the glamorous Vanity Fair magazine. She was formerly known as Bruce Jenner and had won, as Bruce, Olympic gold at the 1976 decathlon. Bruce was furthermore a TV celebrity, featuring as the husband of Kris in 'Keeping up with the Kardashians'. According to Rogers Brubaker: 'Mainstream media commentary on her transition was strikingly positive, applauding her courage and validating her identity as a woman; even president Obama tweeted his support.' (2016: 3).

Dolezal later explained that her identification as a Black woman was genuine. Already as a child she had identified as Black, having grown up with Black siblings, whom her parents had adopted. She was married for several years to an African American man and had one child with him. In an interview she stated: 'I feel that I was born with the essential essence of who I am, whether it matches my anatomy or complexion or not …. Whiteness has always felt foreign to me, for as long as I can remember' (Aitkinhead & Rachel, 2017). In the same interview Dolezal made a comparison with transgenderism, but by then the Jenner/Dolezal affair had already spurred academic debate about the similarities and differences between the two cases, basically revolving about the question 'If Jenner can be transgender, can Dolezal be transracial'? For the wider public in the US the answer was no, with only few voices deviating from that path, sparking again fierce debates. In the feminist journal Hypatia, Tuvel (2017) wrote an article 'In defense of transracialism' and subsequently became the subject of a public controversy herself. On social media, she was fiercely attacked, called a racist and several feminists named her a 'Becky' (that is a female person who is oblivious of race relations).[5] Resulting from social media discussions an open letter appeared, requesting the article to be retracted. Also, one of Hypatia's associate editors posted an apology "for the harms that the publication of the article on transracialism has caused" on Hypatia's Facebook page, claiming it was from "a majority" of the associate editors. In the end, the article was not retracted, but the editors of Hypatia were apparently deeply divided: the editor-in-chief resigned, but so did—it seems under pressure of the nonprofit board—eight of the associate editors.[6]

What was it actually that Tuvel claimed, sparking this controversy? She claimed that if we accept transgender individuals' decision to change sexes, we should also accept transracial individuals' decision to change races (Tuvel, 2017: 264). In a nutshell her argument was: if you accept that what it feels to be a woman is varied and cannot be traced back to some biologically based kernel of experience and, secondly, that the biological or social basis of sex-gender identity should have no bearing whatsoever on society's acceptance of trans individuals, these considerations should also extend to transracialism. Race does not have an essential Black core; one's actual race is a matter of social definition. One's race is determined by things like self-awareness of ancestry, public

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[5] https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Hypatia_transracialism_controversy

[6] https://dailynous.com/2017/07/24/hypatias-associate-editors-resign/

awareness of ancestry, culture, experience and self-identification. Hence, in theory race change is possible. If in practice it is not possible, this is not because race is intrinsically different from gender, but because a society is not willing to allow individual to change their race.

In his book 'Trans. Gender and Race in an age of unsettled identities' (2016), published before Tuvel's article came out, Rogers Brubaker is puzzled why so few people took a position like Tuvel: 'Given its attachment to a language of individual autonomy and social construction, the cultural left *ought* to adopt a consistently voluntarist stance. …. But the overwhelming majority accepted Jenner's claim while rejecting Dolezal's; they combined gender voluntarism with racial essentialism' (p. 27–28; emphasis in original). Brubaker believes this can best be understood as the result of a specific boundary work—while 'racial essentialists' aim at preserving the integrity of racial categories, 'gender voluntarists boundary work sought to protect Jenner—and the still-fragile public legitimacy of transgender claims—from "contamination" by association with Dolezal' (p. 34).

Another explanation Brubaker offers why, while transgender, based on the sex/gender distinction, is a socially recognized identity, transracial is not, is that in the USA there is no corresponding distinction between race as an unchosen inner essence and the racial body as its expression which can be chosen and changed (paraphrasing Brubaker, 2016, 137). This begs the question, if this also holds true for the category of ethnicity. While the reference to biology is even weaker for ethnicity than for race, one would expect ethnicity to be more on the gender side, that is as a changeable identity, than on the race side. Yet, this is not so, according to Brubaker. Genealogical and cultural inheritance are crucially important in definitions of race and ethnicity. And thus 'an individual who identifies with an ethnic or racial category to which she is not entitled by ancestry cannot intelligibly make use of the "born in the wrong body" narrative.' (Brubaker, 2016, 141).

Yet, for many people in continental Europe and for a growing number of people in the Anglo-Saxon world, identification is not defined by ancestry, but understood, borrowing from Judith Butler, as 'performative acts' (1988). If race is a social construction, it can change, adapting itself to a changing situation. Some argue that the category race itself may change, so that more heterogenous groups of people are accepted as 'genuine race members …, resembling kaleidoscopic arrays of core and peripheral members who differ in terms of how many qualifications for belonging they may legitimately claim." (Morning, 2018, 1055). Another possibility is, as we discussed, that a boundary shift would take place. Categories that were previously excluded from White identity, like people of Asian ancestry in the US, or in Europe people that were excluded from national identity, would in the future be included.

An even more radical vision of what it might mean to transcend race is given by Williams (2020) in 'Self-portrait in Black and White', subtitled 'Unlearning race'. Williams (2020) wrote this book after realizing that for his own mixed family the categories of 'Black' and 'White' could not adequately capture their self-conception. His thinking over race made him also sceptical about political organization on the basis of race: 'The most shocking aspect of today's mainstream anti-racist discourse is the extent to which it mirrors ideas of race (…) "Woke" anti-racism proceeds from the premise that race is *real* (italics in original)—if not biological, then socially constructed (…)—putting it in sync

with toxic presumptions of white supremacism that would also like to insist on the fundamentality of racial difference' (Williams, 2020, pp. 128–129).

Yet, his is not the liberal difference-blind ideal, 'to erase the particular or whitewash difference'. (p. 137) What he, instead, is calling for, in our understanding, is fighting racism without falling back on a concept of race and in the words of Young, to 'reclaim the meaning of difference' and redefine it not as exclusion and opposition, but as 'specificity, variation and heterogeneity' (Young, 1990, 171). He claims, hence, for a radical notion of difference.

In his book Chatterton Williams also explains how he came to realize that he must stop identifying as a Black man if he wanted this paradigm shift to take place. He relates about a discussion with Adrian Piper, in his words 'the artist who "retired" from being black' (p. 148) after which the insight came 'Why should I allow the slaver's perception to define *me*? Why should *you*?' (p. 157, italics in original).[7] What at first kept Williams from 'sloughing off his old skin' is loyalty to his Black forebears: 'I pledged alliance to that label … because I wanted to honor the pain as well as the triumph. I did not want to forget it.' (p. 158). Later, he came to see Piper's "retirement" as 'an act of the most extreme rebellion in the face of racism'—and he too decided to become, as he himself expressed it, 'an *ex-black* man' (p. 159, italics in original). He also found out that at the same time nothing fundamental to him had changed: 'My love for the culture of my family and my loyalties were intact. My values were, too. These would be the loyalties and values I would transmit to my daughter. But I would not willfully pass on to her the guilt and the pain of an artificial and externally imposed identity' (p. 159).

This critical postracialism as proposed by Chatterton Williams, in our reading, would acknowledge that we all come from somewhere, that we all have a history, and thus are not all similar (or similarly different), but that this difference cannot be read off someone's face, is not known a priori, but can only be discovered in dialogue.

Conclusion

This view of the future seems far from the world of today. We stated that we want to explore what 'beyond race' may mean from four angles:

(1) 'Beyond race' as a demographic reality of a majority population consisting of people of mixed origin. (2) 'Beyond race' as the possibility to develop public policies that aim to combat inequalities (also along color lines), yet are no longer dependent on a notion of race. (3) 'Beyond race' as a basis for anti-racist political mobilization and (4) 'Beyond race' as a new conceptualization of race that is decoupling biology and culture, or even to stop thinking in racial categories altogether, yet without de-politicizing Black's, or any subjected group's, history and experience.

Maybe this questioning of race, and by implication of ethnicity, like we have done in this opening article, is a typical hang-up of two authors based in Europe. Yet, race thinking does not seem obsolete in the rest of the world. Thus, we wonder, will there come a moment that people of Korean ancestry be accepted as Japanese, that people of African origin be accepted as Chinese, or that domestic workers of Asian origin will have

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[7] Piper's essay 'Passing for White, Passing for Black' (1991) is a must-read for anyone interested in this subject.

the right to acquire citizenship in the Gulf states? That is to say, we expect that in other regions of the world 'beyond race' may in all four senses have a different relevance than in Europe, in the past, present and future, yet these different relevancies also inform each other. How, is up to our discussants to say.

Declarations

Competing interests
The authors declare that they have no competing interests.

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