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Review of Reet Tamme, *Wissenschaft und 'race relations':
Repräsentationen von Multiethnizität in Großbritannien 1950–1980*

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REET TAMME, *Wissenschaft und 'race relations': Repräsentationen von Multiethnizität in Großbritannien 1950–1980* (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2022), vii + 411 pp. ISBN 978 3 110 79057 3. £82.00

The book begins with a focus on Sheila Patterson's study *Dark Strangers*, published in 1963.¹ Although the title of this study is based on Georg Simmel's concept of the 'stranger',² this choice of words is hardly conceivable in the social sciences today as a reference to minorities and migrants. This is precisely why it is impressive to see how far these disciplines have come since then, and Reet Tamme's PhD thesis, which she wrote at the Humboldt-Universität zu Berlin, guides readers along this path from the 1950s to the 1980s.

In her introduction, Tamme describes British race relations research as a 'new system of knowledge production and a new representation system for ethnicity' (p. 2). This is linked to the broader question of whether and how the social sciences help structure social reality, following Peter Berger and Thomas Luckmann.³ At the same time, Tamme states that the social sciences themselves are subject to social change. This has an additional transnational dimension in the case of British race relations research: according to Tamme's thesis, US research provided the decisive theoretical foundations over several decades.

The source base of Tamme's work largely comprises social science publications, in particular from the Chicago School and from the Institute for Race Relations (IRR), which was founded in London in 1958. It also includes reports, organizational charts, and correspondence from the IRR's committees and from the Ford Foundation as a significant third-party funder. These are taken from the institute's and foundation's own archives in London and New York and from the Black Cultural Archives in London, the London Metropolitan Archives, and the National Archives in Kew. Methodologically, Tamme uses a

¹ Sheila Patterson, *Dark Strangers: A Sociological Study of the Absorption of a Recent West Indian Migrant Group in Brixton, South London* (London, 1963).

² Georg Simmel, 'The Stranger', in Georg Simmel, *On Individuality and Social Forms: Selected Writings*, ed. Donald N. Levine (Chicago, 1971), 143–9. This essay was first published in German in 1908.

³ Peter L. Berger and Thomas Luckmann, *The Social Construction of Reality: A Treatise in the Sociology of Knowledge* (Garden City, NY, 1966).

model of discourse analysis that includes texts and institutionalized practices. In addition, she draws on Lutz Raphael's notion of the 'scientification of the social',⁴ since British race relations research has had a strong social reform impulse from the very beginning.

The first chapter is dedicated to the establishment of race relations research in the USA and Great Britain from 1920 to 1960. Tamme provides a detailed overview of the works of the Chicago School and the refutation of the 'scientific' concept of race by Franz Boas, Ruth Benedict, and others. Although these outlines are largely known, they are skilfully summarized here. Gunnar Myrdal, who understood race as socially constructed and race problems as socially caused, plays a central role in Tamme's portrayal. What was notable, however, was that from the 1940s onwards a greater conceptual distinction was drawn between race (for African Americans) and ethnicity (for European immigrants) in the US social science literature. These semantics have also been relevant to the situation in Great Britain since the introduction of the Nationality Act of 1948, which recognized Commonwealth citizens as British citizens. The interest in the living conditions of this new category of citizens was the starting point for British race relations research.

Tamme convincingly places this emerging field in the global context of late colonialism, as well as in the historical context of science. Academic sociology was still not very well developed in Great Britain, and American theoretical impulses were therefore readily adopted. Applied social reform predominated until the 1960s, while early studies of prejudice and discrimination were already highlighting social insecurities and the question of British identity. More powerful, however, for race relations research was the emergence of several paradoxes: on the one hand, the particular needs of immigrants were overlooked because they were officially considered 'ordinary citizens' (p. 112); and on the other, social reform goals often led to the negative singling out of immigrants by discursively creating new stereotypes and prejudices that were applied to the 'Black' population, and by constructing distinctions between 'British' and 'foreign'. It was also

⁴ Lutz Raphael, 'Die Verwissenschaftlichung des Sozialen als methodische und konzeptionelle Herausforderung für eine Sozialgeschichte des 20. Jahrhunderts', *Geschichte und Gesellschaft*, 22/2 (1996), 165-93.

increasingly recognized as a problem at the time that 'White' social scientists were studying 'Black' communities, even if they saw themselves as their advocates.

The second chapter deals with the institutionalization of race relations research in Great Britain at the beginning of the 1960s. The widely publicized riots in Notting Hill in 1958 stimulated activities that aimed to improve race relations. These included the founding of academic institutes and departments of urban sociology, and especially the IRR in London. The IRR's Board of Studies included not only scientists but also businesspeople who invested in the British colonies, and the institute's director, Philip Mason, was also a former colonial official. The IRR had its headquarters in the affluent neighbourhood of St James and published its monographs with Oxford University Press. Tamme pointedly judges that in the IRR, an elite from the worlds of science, business, and politics controlled the production of knowledge about race relations.

Transatlantic ties remained strong: the Ford Foundation was an important third-party donor, and the IRR also entered into collaborations with the University of Denver and the University of California, Berkeley. Above all, however, its major project of undertaking a 'survey of race relations' was explicitly intended to build on an American model and to become a 'Myrdal for Britain' (p. 173), with reference to Myrdal's influential study *An American Dilemma*.⁵ In 1969, the survey was published under the title *Colour and Citizenship*.⁶

However, the 1960s also brought a shift towards a more specifically British approach to race research. Immigration from South Asia came into focus, and multi-ethnicity gradually established itself as a new interpretive pattern for British society, while the idea of assimilation lost importance. At the same time, immigrant groups were increasingly seen as stable units whose well-being should be promoted. Such essentialization was one of the paradoxes of race relations research. Nevertheless, it had a political impact, in major laws such as the 1962 Commonwealth Immigration Act and especially the Race Relations

⁵ Gunnar Myrdal, *An American Dilemma: The Negro Problem and Modern Democracy* (New York, 1944).

⁶ E. J. B. Rose et al., *Colour and Citizenship: A Report on British Race Relations* (Oxford, 1969).

Act of 1965, which brought a series of anti-discrimination regulations into force earlier than elsewhere in Europe.

Children and young people also came into focus in the 1960s. It is estimated that around 170,000 children were classified with terms such as 'immigrant children' or 'second-generation'. This made education in a multi-ethnic environment a new topic for research. While the teaching of English as a second language was established smoothly in schools, there were other controversies: alongside criticism of textbooks that still conveyed colonial worldviews, there was a demand for more Black teachers. Furthermore, in some schools, quota regulations allowing 'non-White' children to make up no more than one third of each class were tried out, as was the bussing system known from America. Finally, special classes were set up, primarily for Afro-Caribbean children.

Chapter three, which addresses the pluralization of the research field from the beginning of the 1970s, offers very pointed descriptions of various crises. Enoch Powell's infamous 'rivers of blood' speech from 1968 stood against the growing influence of the 'Black Power' movement, while in science, so-called radical sociology forced the 'emergence of new theoretical approaches as a counter-representation' (p. 265). In the IRR, these challenges became particularly acute. A new generation of scientists came onto the scene who saw themselves as radical academics. They stood for an epistemic commitment that was openly political, in contrast to the previously claimed 'neutrality' of the IRR. Criticism quickly arose in response to the IRR's flagship study *Colour and Citizenship*, and Black communities who featured in it as research subjects were called on to resist: 'When researchers from the IRR come knocking on their doors for information they will be well advised to tell them to fuck off' (p. 273). Radical scientists now often spoke of a 'race relations industry' and 'scientific colonialism' (p. 273), while Marxist approaches and a reckoning with capitalist structures were very popular.

This new era at the IRR was also reflected in its symbolism and practices. The institute's headquarters were moved from St James to the King's Cross area—closer to Black communities—and the scholarly magazine *Race* was renamed *Race and Class: A Journal for Black and Third World Liberation*. A comprehensive change in personnel also

took place in the committees: political and economic elites gave way to activist representatives of Black communities and Marxist scholars. This reorganization had consequences. The Ford Foundation ended its funding of the IRR and instead focused on individual projects and scientists in Great Britain. In Tamme's judgment, this marked the end of a period of intensive knowledge transfer between the US and Britain. British cultural studies, which were largely influenced by Stuart Hall, embarked on an independent approach in which culture was understood as everyday practice and great attention was paid to media theory. Racism was not to be analysed as a universal phenomenon, but rather in a specific historical context.

In her last chapter, Tamme takes a systematic look at knowledge production and its modes, discussing several models from the sociology of knowledge. She concludes that race relations research evades a traditional disciplinary history because it did not develop any specifically dedicated courses or chairs during the period under investigation. In addition, it imported its methods predominantly from the USA and was characterized by disciplinary heterogeneity and the increasing participation of non-academic representatives, as well as a high level of practical relevance.

Reet Tamme's book shows the change in representations of multi-ethnicity very convincingly, but the parts dedicated to race relations research as a new system of knowledge production have somewhat less momentum. The fact that science should not be understood as a teleological process has already become established in the history of knowledge. Although she shows that interdisciplinarity took root earlier than previously assumed, Tamme does not establish a parallel with Anne Kwaschik's book on the emergence of area studies, which showed precisely this.⁷ In general, Tamme deals well with theories and models of the sociology of knowledge, but engages less often with the historical research literature.

One of the methods of the history of knowledge is to shed light on the biographical characteristics of the actors involved. Tamme does this only for a few actors, and in a brief manner. This reluctance is

⁷ Anne Kwaschik, *Der Griff nach dem Weltwissen: Zur Genealogie von Area Studies im 19. und 20. Jahrhundert* (Göttingen, 2018).

particularly regrettable in the case of two social scientists, Ruth Glass and Marie Jahoda. Born in Berlin and Vienna, they had to emigrate in the 1930s because of their Jewish origins and their political commitments. Against this background, it would have been interesting to find out whether and to what extent both of them also brought Continental European experiences with 'race' and racism into British race relations research. This question is also of interest because the translation of terms and concepts is a recurring issue in Tamme's work. In her German text, Tamme uses the term 'ethnicity' where American social scientists were still speaking of 'race', and she uses 'multi-ethnic' when British social scientists were evoking the vision of a 'multi-racial Britain'. After all, Tamme points out that in Great Britain too, the term 'ethnicity' increasingly replaced 'race' and became partly interchangeable with it—in contrast to developments in the USA which are shaping current racism research.

Debates like these show the great advantage of studies of the history of knowledge, such as that by Reet Tamme. They offer the insight that many of the challenges, tensions, and perspectives encountered today in the scientific discussion about migration and racism have been around for decades and have—sometimes forgotten—forerunners and pioneers. They show which paths were taken back then, and which are no longer being pursued today. With her detailed presentation of institutionalized practices, Tamme also offers fascinating insights into the British research landscape on late colonialism, decolonization, and the Commonwealth. These findings seem all the more powerful because Tamme refrains from political commentary and pointed argument. This pronounced objectivity is also stylistically beneficial, since well-chosen source quotations and praxeological micro-insights provide fine narrative counterpoints to the otherwise sober tone of the book. This thoroughly crafted and very readable study is indispensable to any future research work on migration, race, and ethnicity, as well as the history of knowledge and the contemporary history of Great Britain.

BOOK REVIEWS

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