

Milan HRABOVSKÝ
(2018)

RACE

People's race classifications

Bratislava: Veda, 359 s.

Race, racial classification, racial hatred, racial intolerance, racism, racist. These words are repeated in various contexts in the media and in everyday conversations; they come from the mouths of public figures, scientists and academics, as well as ordinary people. In brief, they are part of professional (scientific and academic) and lay discourse. However, we only rarely encounter in this context clear definitions of these concepts. The book "Race: a racial classification of people" offers answers to many questions relating to this issue.

The author, Milan Hrabovský, says that he was driven to write this book by two main motivations. The first was the attempt to show that research into the issue of race should focus on three main variants of "race" research (Hrabovský, 2018, p. 13, quotation marks in the original): research into the etymology of the word "race", research into race classifications, research into race ideologies.

The author's second motivation to write the book includes several partial motivations, which he gradually discovered during the research. The first was the lack of literature in the Slovak context to deal exclusively and in detail with the issue of race. The second motivation was discovering "a wide chasm... between the specialist (scientific) definition of the concept of race, and how ordinary people [which is not meant in the negative sense of the term] and non-specialists define the concept of race" (Hrabovský, 2018, p. 14). The third part was the attempt to bridge the differences in the definitions and research into the issue of race between the natural and social sciences (Hrabovský, 2018, p. 14-15).

The author looks at the issue of race and racial classifications from several angles. He synthesises relevant information from many disciplines (anthropology, biology, genetics, history, philosophy, cultural and social anthropology, sociology etc.) which he presents to the reader in a clear and comprehensible form. Sometimes it might appear that social scientists and natural scientists speak different languages. However, the author in his book speaks a single language: the language of purposeful methodology, clearly defined terms and detailed analysis. He speaks to the reader in the language of science. A specialist language, yet one still comprehensible to lay people.

In order for Hrabovský to avoid any misunderstandings and the confusion of terms, he distinguishes between scientific theory (based on logical clarity, internal consistency, harmony with empirically observed facts and their subsequent ability to be tested and checked), and “theory” (speculation, fabrication) (Hrabovský, 2018, p. 59). When analysing racial “theories” promoted in Germany in the first half of the twentieth century, he uses the word theory in its second sense (e.g. Nazi “racial theory”). Such an approach makes it easier for the reader to find his/her way around the text and helps him/her understand individual ideas.

Last, but not least, we should mention that the author was also driven to write this book by the systematic lack of knowledge of the issue in the educational system, not only in primary and secondary schools, but also in universities in Slovakia, as well as by various imprecisions concerning the definitions and the analysis of the race issue in dictionaries and textbooks.¹ From a formal point of view, the publication is divided into a preface, a section entitled “Entering the race issue”, and two main chapters (From four letters to Aryan skulls; From genetics to bio-culture). The book itself is the culmination of research which lasted almost ten years, the length and quality of which is reflected in its content, which testifies to the author’s erudition and knowledge of the issue. The reader does not feel lost in a labyrinth of analysed concepts, theories, thoughts and ideas; Hrabovský accompanies him/her wisely and lightly along all the paths in the book, while also explaining why certain roads which many researchers have taken are dead ends.

In the Slovak context, says Hrabovský, several books have also been written in which the authors examine the issue of racism, extremism and political ideology (Hrabovský, 2018, p. 18).² However, the book does not deal primarily with racism, but with the concept of race and racial classifications from ancient times to the twenty-first century (Hrabovský, 2018, p. 19). Hra-

¹ The author is referring to the electronic version of the “Dictionary of the Contemporary Slovak Language” of the Ľudovít Štúr Institute of Linguistics of the Slovak Academy of Sciences and one recently published textbook for grammar schools (Drozdíková, 2010).

² Hrabovský mentions, for example, Vašečka 2002; Milo, 2005; Mesežnikov – Gyarfášová, 2016. We may also mention Nižňanský & Hrabovský, 2013.

bovský, however, analyses the so-called new *cultural racism*. Present-day “new racism” has changed into *cultural racism*, which is not based on the “biological” hierarchisation of races, but defends “insurmountable differences between culturally defined ethnicities”. The fear of “mixing races” changes in rhetoric to the fear of “mixing cultures” (Hrabovský, 2018, p. 273-280, 318-319, quotation marks and italics in the original).

The publication by Milan Hrabovský is accessible to erudite experts, as well as to the lay person thirsty for knowledge. The book “Race: the racial classification of people” represents in this sense and in the Slovak context a unique achievement. It fills in important gaps in the field of research into the concept/ word of race, racial classifications, racial “theories”. It provides essential information on researchers, historical figures and scientists who influenced in some way, whether with their works or acts, thinking on these phenomena.

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