

Bridge walk

a series of lectures on bridging the gap between different faculties and disciplines

Date & Time: Wednesday 20.11.2024 | 17:00 – 18:15

Organizers: Mohammad Khair Nahhas & Fares Damien

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Science and African History: Towards an Ethics of Practice

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Abstract

Can a historical experience specific to a place and time have consequences that reach beyond the scope in which this experience took place? The birth of modern bioethics is directly connected to the outcome of the Nuremberg Doctors' Trial. This shows that learnings from history have led to the establishment of a set of rules that have had an impact of global significance. Specifically, it is an attempt to learn from the outcome of a particular conception of science and biology, namely negative eugenics and its quest for 'biological purity'. In this sense, bioethics is a means through which some human societies have endeavoured to learn from their past mistakes, to learn from their history. I would like to ask similar questions of the African historical experience, in relation to the practice of medical science on the African continent. To what extent the use of African ethnic labels in the classification of genomic data contribute to biologizing these ethnic identities? What learnings can we develop out of the African historical experience in order to prevent the reproduction of patterns reminiscent of trends already visible in the heyday of scientific racism (late 19th- mid-20th centuries)?

Biosketch

Henri Michel Yéré (MA, PhD) is currently a researcher and lecturer based at the Centre for African Studies at the University of Basel, Switzerland. He also teaches at the École Polytechnique Fédérale de Lausanne (EPFL.) A trained historian, Henri has worked on questions of citizenship and nationality in the colonial and postcolonial contexts. His more recent work has taken a sociological slant, looking at the relationships between the natural sciences and society at large.