

The Mental Decolonization

UNESCO, Globalization and Pedagogy, 1945-65

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Peace in the minds

The extent of the Nazi violence during World War II led to a widespread recognition among national leaders of the need for political leadership on a global level, and the United Nations came into existence in October 1945. Its task was to ensure collective security and create an international declaration of human rights based on the ethical principle that all human beings – regardless of their differences – were equal and shared the same fundamental rights.

The organization was to ensure peace through military, economic and social measures. But there was also the recognition that peace could only be maintained if it was based on a genuine solidarity between people. To achieve this end, in November 1945 44 countries agreed to the establishment of the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO). The constitution's preamble formulated the task of the new specialized agency: "Since wars begin in the minds of men, it is in the minds of men that the defences of peace must be constructed."¹

This paper will give an overview of the implementation and impact of two major initiatives by UNESCO to carry out this piece of mental engineering – the first initiative being the construction of a new collective memory of mankind in order to bring people together, the other being the deconstruction of the concept of race which had proved divisive and which had been used as a way to legitimize colonialism and the Holocaust.

The construction of mankind

As one of the founding fathers of the new organization, the English biologist Julian S. Huxley was preoccupied with identifying the tasks that could ensure peace in the long term.

For that purpose he involved his old friend Professor Joseph Needham, the eccentric biochemist from Cambridge University, who was in charge of British scientific assistance to China at the time. Needham had become deeply interested in Chinese history and had just published a book on the history of Chinese technology, in which he demonstrated the enormous and underestimated importance of Chinese inventions on developments in other parts of the world. He suggested to Huxley that the new organization took on the task of binding people together by writing the history of the entire mankind stressing the importance of cultural interchange – as an antidote to the kind of history taught in many schools focusing on military and political events and

¹ *Constitution of the United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization: Adopted in London on 16 November 1945, preamble.*

based on ethnocentric biases and preconceptions. A work of this kind could be used as a source for classroom textbooks for schools in all countries and could contribute to UNESCO's mission of education for peace.²

Needham was the first person Huxley invited to join the staff, and in March 1946 he returned from China to take office in one of the new organization's two adjoining small terrace houses at Belgrave Square near Victoria Station in London. However, watching the barrage of unread documents piling up on delegates at that time, Huxley decided to wait a couple of years before initiating the process of constructing a collective memory of mankind. But he and Needham discussed the idea whenever they had time.³

In November 1946 UNESCO moved to Paris, where it established its new headquarters in a former hotel in Avenue Kléber near the Arc de Triomphe – a beautiful old building full of elegance and gilded ceilings and chandeliers – with Huxley as its first Director-General and Needham as the first head of its Natural Science Department. At about this time they hired the Portuguese historian Armando Cortesão as consultant on the project under Needham's guidance. In the following months Cortesão investigated the impact of science on the history of mankind.⁴

During the first two months of 1947 the project began to take shape and was the subject of lengthy discussions with prominent scholars mainly from France about science as the prime mover in history. But looking at the notes that were the immediate outcome of these meetings, the plan still seemed fairly Eurocentric in the choices of the names and events that the work was to cover.⁵

In that sense the project was – for all its good intentions – a reflection of the fact that UNESCO's principal contributors at all the various levels of the organization were at the time still primarily from France, United Kingdom and USA. The reason for this was that the USSR and several other Communist countries had refused to join the organization, while significant portions of other continents were under colonial rule. At the same time the concept of “mankind” – and not “humankind” or “humanity” – was characteristic for the male-dominated organization of the 1940's.

The UNESCO General Conference in Mexico City from in November and December 1947 adopted a resolution that welcomed the idea of producing such a history of mankind with an emphasis on the “understanding of the scientific and cultural aspects of the history of mankind, of the mutual inter-dependence of peoples and cultures and of their contributions to the common heritage”.⁶

But shortly after this the project faced a major blowback. UNESCO had long been under suspicion from the US of being a cover for espionage, and the CIA had warned President Harry S. Truman that the organization was being

² Julian Huxley: *Memories*, Vol. 1, New York: Harper & Row (1970), p. 54; Letter from Julian Huxley to F.J.H. Stratton, 5.9.1950, Box 19, The Julian Sorell Huxley Papers, Fondren Library, Rice University, Texas (RU).

³ Julian Huxley: “Notes on the History of Mankind: Cultural and Scientific Development”, December 1961, p. 2, SCHM 1, UNESCO Archives, Paris (UA).

⁴ “The History of Science and its Relation to Philosophy, Humanities and Social Sciences” [Report], 22.1.1947, SCHM 7, UA.

⁵ Memo, 14.11.1947 and “Cultural and Scientific History of the World: Suggestions by JSH – 1947”, Box 118, RU.

⁶ *Records of the General Conference of the United Nations Educational and Cultural Organization, Second Session*, Paris, UNESCO, 1947, resolution 5.7.

infiltrated by communists. Joseph Needham attracted particular attention due to his interest in science and to the fact that he was a member of the Cambridge University Communist Group.⁷

Needham felt under pressure to resign, and in the beginning of 1948 he moved back to Cambridge, where he began working on what was to become his masterpiece on science and civilisation in China. Huxley and Cortesão now had to design the project by themselves.⁸

However, in the light of the United Nations' Universal Declaration of Human Rights from 1948 and of the organization's debates on decolonization, the world was about to change, and this was soon to be reflected in their work, too. In late October 1948 Huxley and Cortesão had meetings with European scholars to discuss the plan and its execution in order to sell it at the coming General Conference. Among the invitees were the French historian Lucien Febvre, Professor at the Collège de France, who was already a living legend among fellow historians for his journal commonly known as the *Annales*, with its emphasis on social rather than political and diplomatic themes, and for his own agenda of organizing the past in accordance with present needs.

Febvre stressed that the History of Mankind project should in his eyes attempt truly to integrate all cultures in the new world civilization. Thus the final plan wiped out cultural hierarchies and geographical priorities and emphasized the "exchanges" between *all* cultures. To ensure this global approach, the work was to be written by an entire group of specialists representing all continents.⁹

Huxley was fully satisfied with the outcome. But his term as Director-General was about to end, as the Americans, for various reasons, did not support his continued candidacy, and Huxley describes in his memoirs how his last and most difficult task at the General Conference in Beirut in Lebanon in November 1948 was to persuade the delegates to implement his proposals for a history of mankind. He finally managed to get the plan approved and entrusted to a sub-commission under UNESCO that would undertake the enormous project.¹⁰

The deconstruction of race

On his return to Europe, Huxley had been replaced as the organization's Director-General by the Mexican writer and diplomat, Jaime Torres Bodet – and he had other priorities.

Especially the sense that racism still posed a potential danger and that it might come to dominate as a doctrine in some countries, as well as the need for a scientific approval of the claims of the human rights declaration, was something that he was preoccupied with. That paved the way for a UN resolution initiated by the former Swedish Trade Minister Gunnar Myrdal – author of *An American Dilemma* and UN-employee at the time – on the Prevention of Discrimination and Protection of Minorities in Europe, which

⁷ "Evaluation of Communist infiltration of UNESCO. Report. Central Intelligence Agency. Top Secret", 7.2.1947, Declassified Documents Reference System, Ohio University.

⁸ Simon Winchester: *The Man Who Loved China*, New York: HarperCollins (2008), p. 166.

⁹ "Draft Document for the General Conference. SCHM" [Undated], p. 1, SCHM 7, UA.

¹⁰ Huxley (1970), p. 69.

recommended that UNESCO launched “a program of disseminating scientific facts designed to remove what is commonly known as racial prejudice.”¹¹

On 10 December 1948, the UN human rights declaration was adopted, while the Brazilian ethnographer Arthur Ramos – an outspoken critic of racial inequality in South America – was approved as head of UNESCO’s Department of Social Sciences, with special responsibility for its new race project.

Ramos immediately began designing the paper that would form the basis for a statement endorsed by scientific authorities from around the world. Ramos invited a team of ten scientists all of whom were recruited from the marginal group of anthropologists, psychologists, sociologists and ethnographers who perceived the race concept primarily as a social construct. Among them were Claude Lévi-Strauss, the French ethnographer from Musée de l’Homme in Paris, and Ashley Montagu, professor of anthropology from Rutgers University and already widely known in the US at the time as an outspoken critic of racial inequality. These men were expected by UNESCO to come up with “a global scientific consensus on race.”¹²

In December 1949 the panel met at the UNESCO headquarters in Paris with Montagu as “rapporteur”. In wake of the first day of meetings Montagu wrote most of his proposal for a final statement on race during the night at a nearby hotel, and over the following days the participants discussed the race concept in the light of Montagu’s draft.¹³

The draft was obviously Montagu’s attempt to create a single, universal rejection of the concept of race, which he found scientifically indefensible, and he was convinced that, by discrediting the concept, UNESCO would effectively prevent any racial theories for being used for political purposes in the future.

UNESCO had a number of external people to read the preliminary results, and the conclusion that race was entirely a social myth made shocking reading for some of them. UNESCO’s former Director-General Julian Huxley in particular was dissatisfied with certain passages that he found too dogmatic or provocative. He suggested that Montagu revised the statement so that the concept of race was not reduced solely to a myth but dealt with the fact that people did at least look different in different parts of the world. If the statement only addressed racial differences that had social or cultural origins and that might be dismissed as “pseudo-racial”, or if it was too negative in its design, it would not last for long and at worst would damage the reputation of UNESCO.¹⁴

¹¹ ECOSOC, 6th Session, April 1948, Resolution 116 (VI) B, UN Archives, New York (UNA) and letter from Henri Laugier to Julian Huxley 20.4.1948, 323.1, UNESCO Archives, Paris (UA).

¹² “Activities of UNESCO” [29.10.1949], 1.11.1949, 323.1, UA. Also “Committee of Experts for the Study of Racial Prejudice”, SG 76/5/05, S-0441-0401, UNA.

¹³ Wiktor Stoczkowski : “Racisme, antiracisme et cosmologie lévi-straussienne: Un essai d’anthropologie réflexive”, *L’Homme*, No. 182 (2007), p. 16.

¹⁴ Letter from Julian Huxley to Robert C. Angell 26.1.1950, 323.12 A 102, UA and Claudio Pogliano: “‘Statements on Race’ dell’UNESCO: Cronica di un Lungo Travaglio”, *Nuncius. Annali di Storia della Scienza*, vol. 6. no. 1 (2001), p. 347-348.

In July the final version was complete. It began by stating that all people belonged to the same biological species. There were indeed several different groups with distinct physical characteristics, but the differences between them were small and insignificant in the context of the overall similarities. From a biological point of view one could therefore consider a “race” – Montagu added the quotation marks – as a population characterized by certain overlapping features that were associated with the frequency and distribution of hereditary facilities and were a result of geographical or cultural isolation. These differences and their role were often over-estimated and seen as more fundamental than was the case, so that national, cultural, religious, geographic and linguistic groups had been called “races” on false premises. As a result the idea of racial superiority was unscientific, and the statement recommended that the race concept was replaced by the culturally-rooted concept of “ethnic group”. This concept made more sense scientifically, because people gravitated into marriage and procreation on the basis of cultural similarities and subjective feelings of belonging to the same culture, which were crucial for the spread of individual genes. This meant that culture steered human biology and not vice versa.

Due to Huxley, however, the statement ended with a passage stressing that equality between ethnic groups should not be understood to mean that all individuals were necessarily equally well-equipped in intelligence and character. In stead he recommended that people stick together. “The unity of mankind from both the biological and social viewpoints is the main thing. To recognize this and to act accordingly is the first requirement of modern man.”¹⁵

This *Statement on Race* was published on 18 July 1950 and accompanied by a press release with a headline proclaiming: “No biological justification for race discrimination, say world scientists: Most authoritative statement on the subject.” A second press release, which explained the statement’s historical background, declared that “race is less a biological fact than a social myth”, while the *UNESCO Courier* promoted the news as “the scientific basis for human unity.”¹⁶

The impact of UNESCO’s pedagogical initiatives on race

The first statement on race was undeniably an intellectual landmark, and UNESCO estimated that the arguments legitimizing racial prejudice and racial discrimination would collapse and disappear by themselves as the news spread.

The statement did, in fact, receive plenty of publicity. An inventory of the press clippings that UNESCO managed to collect in the year 1950 shows that it was mentioned in at least 133 news articles, 62 in-depth articles and leaders, and in eight major news reports from all over the world – and it found widespread support. “Whenever it is, whatever form it takes, racism is an evil force, and to the extent that UNESCO can kill it by the truth, it will do good,” the *New York Times* proclaimed.¹⁷

¹⁵ *Four Statements on the Race Problem*. Paris: UNESCO (1969), pp. 30-35.

¹⁶ Press clippings in 323.12 A 102, UA.

¹⁷ “The Myth of Race” (1950); Letter from Douglas H. Schneider to Max McCullough, 4.1.1951, 323.12 A 102, UA.

Nevertheless, it soon appeared that the environmentalist statement – despite Julian Huxley's moderations – went beyond what mainstream scientists accepted as factual evidence about race, and it could most certainly not be said to represent a universal definition of race at the time.

Criticism appeared in the English newspaper *The Times* in July and again in the magazine *UNESCO Courier* in July-August 1950. It was formulated by the English anthropologist William H. Fagg, editor of the prestigious journal *Man* and president of the British Royal Anthropological Institute. Fagg expressed his disagreement with the conclusions of the statement, which he characterized as “the Ashley Montagu Statement on Race published by UNESCO”, and he was considering setting up his own panel of experts that would formulate a new statement.¹⁸

The debate caused renewed publicity, and UNESCO later concluded that the “dogme raciste” was one of the most talked-about topics in the news media worldwide over the following months. But it was far from all positive press, and the American cultural anthropologist Margaret Mead wrote an alarming letter to the Swiss-American ethnographer Alfred Métraux – now in charge of UNESCO's race project – urging the organization to come up with immediate countermeasures, otherwise its work was in danger of being discredited and ridiculed.¹⁹

UNESCO decided to have the statement revised by assembling another panel of experts to provide a “supplement” designed by anthropologists and geneticists.

This time it was left it to the American geneticist, Professor L.C. Dunn from Columbia University, to formulate the outcome. The other experts on the panel were, like Dunn, all renowned scientists. In order to make sure that the second statement would not differ too much from the first, UNESCO clearly stated this time that the aim of the statement was to be the foundation of a “campaign against racialism” and “the abatement of racialistic ideas by the propagation of truth in the form of the findings of science.”²⁰

The seven anthropologists and five geneticists met in Paris in June 1951, and by December 1951 Dunn had incorporated the many comments. The main conclusion of the first statement was retained since the experts had agreed that all people had the same origin and were fundamentally equal. But on other issues the new statement seemed rather vague, since the intention was to make it both politically and scientifically watertight this time. For example, it did not make much use of the race concept. On the other hand it did not reject the concept and acknowledged that it did make sense to divide humanity into three main races, black, yellow and white, as long as the division only was claimed to hold true for physical and not for mental differences.²¹

It could be said that the second statement was a clear retreat from the first since it came up with a way to retain race as a meaningful category, which then received official approval from UNESCO. But at the same time the concept of race was defined in a non-racist way by rejecting the notion that mental traits

¹⁸ According to a letter from Don J. Hager to R.S. Fenton, 29.1.1951, 323.12 A 102, UA.

¹⁹ Letters from Margaret Mead to Alfred Métraux, 6.11. and 9.11.1950, 323.12 A 102, UA.

²⁰ “UNESCO and Race”, *Man*, May 1951, p. 64.

²¹ UNESCO (1969), pp. 36-43.

could be used in classifying races, which was a reinforcement of the first statement and directly opposed to Huxley's approach. In that way the concept of race lost its potential to legitimize racial discrimination and could form the basis of UNESCO's efforts to combat "the evil of racism."²²

This time the criticism turned out to be on a much smaller scale and mostly by extremist groupings who did not feel that their views had been heard.

UNESCO was, however, obliged to go further than simply reviewing the scientific fact of race. The content needed popularization to educate the public.

This pedagogical strategy resulted in three series – *The Race Question and Modern Science*, *The Race Question and Modern Thought*, and *Race and Society* – launched by UNESCO the following years to combat racial inequality. Each of the series consisted of a number of small pamphlets in French and English and for some of them also in other languages.²³

Métraux claimed in 1952 that UNESCO's pamphlets on race were the organization's best-selling publications. The most remarkable being Claude Lévi-Strauss' *Race and History* from 1952, which promoted the concept of "culture" in stead of "biology" and sought to avoid an interpretation of cultural differences as an expression of inequality, seeing it rather as an expression of diversity developed under the influence of historical events. Today Lévi-Strauss' work is still considered to be the best selling book of the organization's entire history.²⁴

Nevertheless the pamphlets did not seem to be very effective for educational purposes in the short run. They had problems reaching the "man in the street" in most of the member countries. This was first and foremost because they were written in foreign languages but also, as a study showed, because they were too difficult to understand. The reader required at least a high school degree to grasp the contents. In addition, their layout was not very compelling.²⁵

Maybe it was naively optimistic to think that UNESCO could resolve conflicts and tragedies only by disseminating the knowledge of researchers. In the long run, however, the publications proved their ability to infiltrate national education systems because they were written by recognized scientists, were discussed and used in leading scientific journals, and represented a steady bombardment of publications that at least physical anthropologists had to deal with. In the early 1950s the pamphlets represented a substantial proportion of all the new titles published in the field of anthropology, and in the late 1950s the pamphlets had been translated into 13 languages and printed in more than 300,000 copies.

Slowly the discipline of anthropology changed its content. The number of anthropologists that based the career on physical measurements or family studies was reduced, and those that were left began to characterize themselves

²² Harry L. Shapiro: "Revised Version of UNESCO Statement on Race", *American Journal of Physical Anthropology*, 1952, p. 363.

²³ Letter from E.L. Taylor to Alfred Métraux, 31.5.1950, 323.1, UA.

²⁴ Claude Lévi-Strauss: *Race and History*. Liège: UNESCO (1952).

²⁵ Gerhardt Saenger: "The Effect of Intergroup Attitudes of the UNESCO Pamphlets on Race", *Social Problems*, vol. 3, no. 1 (1955), pp. 21-27 and Michelle Brattain: "Race, Racism, and Antiracism: UNESCO and the Politics of Presenting Science to the Post-war Public", *American Historical Review*, vol. 112, no. 5 (2007), p. 1406.

only as physical anthropologists. Even paleoanthropologists felt that they could only refer to the human diversity of the prehistoric man with a certain amount of anxiety.²⁶

The organization was highly popular in most of the European countries in the aftermath of the war, and only few of the national commissions therefore had problems convincing politicians and educational boards to use the publications issued by UNESCO. In November 1951 the Assembly of the French Union adopted a proposal to publicize the statements on race and to include them in school syllabuses, and many other European member states revised school textbooks in accordance with the guidelines of UNESCO – not least in West Germany.

Even in Denmark, where for a long time the national commission conceived of Denmark solely as an exporter of culture, experimental education was finally initiated. The promotion of international understanding soon became official Danish education policy, and with economical support from UNESCO textbooks and teaching methods were improved to incorporate the latest possible information about race. Such improvements were important in that they could encourage a reversal of certain negative images that were traditionally prevalent among Danes about other peoples such as Africans, Jews and Greenlanders.²⁷

A similar interest in UNESCO's work was to be found in other parts of the world, and some countries even came to play an active role in the race project. That happened when, in order to give instructions on how to create harmonious relations, Alfred Métraux initiated studies of places where people of different origin apparently lived peacefully together. The most ambitious of these studies was carried out by a number of Brazilian anthropologists. Later, however, a Brazilian formula of "racial democracy" where the practice of social cohesion ignored colour proved, like similar studies of other countries, to be an illusion.²⁸

In Rhodesia UNESCO helped to found a university institute on "race relations" that would help spread the organization's pamphlets in the segregated country, and an employee in India and Indonesia, where UNESCO had permanent offices, later recalled that there had been "great interest among scientists as well as laymen in those parts of the race problem [the racial inequality] and UNESCO's pamphlets" in these countries in the early 1950's.²⁹

In the US, the UNESCO national commission agreed that the most effective way to eliminate racial prejudice and diminish discrimination was through progressive education of the public. Thus the UNESCO statements of 1950 and

²⁶ Robert N. Proctor: "Human Recency and Race", in: Harold W. Baillie (etc.) (ed.): *Is Human Nature Obsolete?* Cambridge: MIT Press (2005), p. 253.

²⁷ "Activities of Member States [UNESCO]", Foreign Service Posts of the Department of State, France, Paris Embassy. RG 84, box 1, NARA; Poul Duedahl: *Fra overmenneske til UNESCO-menneske [From SUPERman to UNESCOman]* [Unpublished Ph.D. Dissertation, Aalborg University, Denmark] (2007), p. 340.

²⁸ Marcos Chor Maio: "UNESCO and the Study of Race Relations in Brazil", *Latin American Research Review*, vol. 36, no. 2 (2001), pp. 118-136.

²⁹ Letter from Alexander Wolsky to Rhoda Métraux, 26.3.1958, The Rhoda Métraux Papers, Box 8, Manuscripts Division, Library of Congress, Washington DC (LOC); "Teaching of Race Relations – Rhodesia and Nyasaland", 323.12:37 (689) AMS, UA.

1951 were distributed and were used and taught in “re-education” workshops in schools and churches all over the country.

But the strategy was not implemented without some resistance. Wesley C. George, professor of anatomy at the School of Medicine, University of North Carolina, was one of the critics – being a strong supporter of segregation. “The real purpose,” he declared, “is to indoctrinate people, somewhat clandestinely, with the particular ideologies of those directing the re-education.” That was apparently done by the national commission controlling the distribution of information by giving “favorable press to party-line books.”³⁰

Another outspoken American segregationist of the time criticized the fact that so many UNESCO employees were students from Columbia University, meaning that they were environmentalists and members of what he referred to as a Franz Boas cult. “The public had some familiarity with a majority of these names,” he later recalled. “Almost all the tracts on race distributed by UNESCO and similar organizations were authored by them, as were most of the books and articles available in bookstores and on newsstands. Their views were often aired on network television and radio. But their personal backgrounds were not so well known.”³¹

One pamphlet in particular was under attack in the US. That was L.C. Dunn’s pamphlet *Race and Biology* from 1951, which claimed that income, education, cultural advantages, and other opportunities determined intelligence and not race. That viewpoint provoked Congressman Andrew J. May from Kentucky to discredit the pamphlet and caused officials of the United States Army to ban it.³²

That summer there was also a hearing before the Senate Appropriations Committee on the work and costs of UNESCO, which revealed “an attitude more critical than at any previous time” and which was supported by the criticism from the general public.³³

The US sentiment towards UNESCO became even more hostile when Dwight D. Eisenhower came to power in 1953. The administration announced that the United States had decided to abandon the UN human rights declaration, since it harboured communistic ideas. Anybody working on human rights now risked being labelled a Communist and thereby being politically ostracized.³⁴

In Los Angeles UNESCO programmes and publications were eventually banished from the public school system in 1953, and this successful fight of “patriotic” groups soon led to apprehension among school administrators all over the country concerning the use in public schools of any of UNESCO’s publications, regardless of their content.³⁵

³⁰ John P. Jackson, Jr.: *Science for Segregation: Race, Law, and the Case against Brown v. Board of Education*. New York: New York University Press (2005), p. 89.

³¹ Carleton Putnam: *Race and Reality*. Cape Canaveral: Howard Allen (1980), chapter 2.

³² Melinda Gormley: “Geneticist L.C. Dunn: Politics, Activism, and Community” [Unpublished Ph.D. Dissertation, Oregon State University, 2006], p. 424.

³³ Letter from Charles A. Thomson to Jaime Torres Bodet, 6.3.1952, Foreign Service Posts of the Department of State, France, Paris Embassy. RG 84, box 29, NARA.

³⁴ Carol Anderson: *Eyes off the Prize: The United Nations and the African American Struggle for Human Rights, 1944–1955*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press (2003), p. 5-6.

³⁵ Anthony Q. Hazard: “Post-war Anti-racism: The US, UNESCO and Race, 1945-68” [Unpublished Ph.D. dissertation, Temple University, 2007]; “The UNESCO School Decision”, *Los Angeles Times*, 22.1.1953 and Saenger (1955), p. 22.

The 1950's were, however, a time in which old attitudes changed as a result of the outcome of several legal cases on racial segregation conducted by the U.S. National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP).

Among the witnesses the defence used a number of social scientists – one being the Canadian-American psychologist Otto Klineberg from Columbia University who was deeply engaged in UNESCO's work. Klineberg saw the opportunity to promote the work of UNESCO, and at a meeting in Paris in August 1952 he and fourteen other prominent psychologists publically expressed their full support for UNESCO's work on race, which had “not only scientific interest but very important practical implications.”³⁶

From now on, as the cases on segregation reached the US Supreme Court, the outcome of UNESCO's race program would play a more visible role. The first time was in the appeal argument for the Supreme Court in a case in 1952. During the appeal some of the UNESCO pamphlets were referred to, and the first UNESCO statement on race was used in an attempt to discredit the idea of racial inequality.³⁷

A year later a social science statement on the effects of segregation and the consequences of desegregation was presented to the Supreme Court by the NAACP. It was signed by 32 American social scientists. Among the names were several actively involved in the work of UNESCO – including Otto Klineberg now Head of UNESCO's Division of Applied Social Sciences. The signatories had come to a consensus that enforced segregation was psychologically detrimental to members of the segregated group as well as to those of the majority group, and they claimed that fears based on the assumption of innate racial differences in intelligence were not well founded. The statement came to form the basis of many of the questions to which the Supreme Court Justices addressed themselves during the final hearings of the civil rights cases.³⁸

One of these was the historic decision in the case *Oliver Brown versus Board of Education of Topeka, Shawnee County, Kansas*, of May 1954. Here UNESCO's work was referred to by the defence as the newest available scientific evidence, and was later referred to by the Chief Justice as a cornerstone of the court's decision. The conclusion was that separating children in public schools on the basis of race was discrimination and thus unconstitutional. This milestone decision marked the end of legalized racial segregation in public schools and had an immediate effect on one-third of the American states.³⁹

All of a sudden social scientists – with the authority of UNESCO – had become social engineers. The extent of the attention paid to them during the trials had diminished the authority of biological arguments and confirmed the impression that segregation was of a political and historical character.

³⁶ “Psychologists Map Unit to Aid UNESCO”, *The New York Times*, 23.8.1952.

³⁷ *Spottswood Thomas Bolling, et al. v. C. Melvin Sharpe, et al.*: October Term, 1952, US Supreme Court Records and Briefs, p. 17, LOC.

³⁸ Jackson (2005), pp. 155-164.

³⁹ *Brown (Oliver) v. Board of Education of Topeka, Kansas*, 349 US 294 (1955): October Term 1954: Reply Brief 4/11/1955, US Supreme Court Records and Briefs, p. 12-13, and Papers of the NAACP, part 3: The Campaign for Educational Equality. Series C: Legal Department and Central Office records, 1951-55, LOC.

The only place that UNESCO did not have much of an impact was in South Africa. Here the controversies over race and intelligence had been going on for decades, and conclusions pointed in very different directions. Despite its *de facto* segregation South Africa had nevertheless become a member of UNESCO in June 1946, and the country had immediately benefited from the organization's work on adult education and its scholarships for South African students wishing to study abroad.

The issue of race did not arise as a problem until the ideology of white supremacy was institutionalized with the apartheid laws of 1948, making South Africa the only country in the world with an official racist policy. UNESCO's race programme inevitable struck at the heart of the apartheid ideology, and as early as in July 1948 the South African government was accusing UNESCO of interference in "domestic matters" by distributing material that included views on race that conflicted with the apartheid ideology within the borders of the country. The government acted by refusing to spend further money on its national commission, which was soon to be described as "practically dead".⁴⁰

From now on the tactic employed by UNESCO headquarters was to move carefully in order not to cause South Africa to withdraw from the organization. The country's continued membership would allow the organization to operate legally within its borders.

A couple of years passed with tolerant diplomacy. The South African government predictably objected to what they deemed "irresponsible" statements on the race question, and the circulation of the subsequent race pamphlets caused real concern and increased the government's already high levels of concern. In September 1952 a South African newspaper revealed that the government had banned the pamphlet *Roots of Prejudice* by the American sociologist Arnold Rose. The pamphlet outlined the causes and effects of racial prejudice and contained a passage stating that "the strongest prejudice and the largest number of false beliefs about negroes are to be found in South Africa."⁴¹ The pamphlet was immediately banned as objectionable, indecent and obscene literature and caused a debate within the government over UNESCO's right to distribute its publications in the country.

Similar incidents occurred, and during a session of the South African parliament in April 1955, the Minister of External Affairs, Erik H. Louw, made it official the government had decided – as a result of the organization's interference in South Africa's racial problems – that the country would withdraw from UNESCO with effect from 31 December 1956.⁴²

Altogether there remained substantial problems relating to race that had to be addressed in South Africa, the US and in some of the former colonies. On the other hand there was an optimistic confidence in the impact of the existing information, and at the very same day as South Africa officially withdrew from UNESCO, the organization closed its race division.

But on Christmas Eve 1959 swastikas were smeared on a new synagogue in Cologne in West Germany. The incident triggered a wave of similar incidents,

⁴⁰ Letter from Union Education Department of South Africa to W.H.C. Laves, 8.7.1948, X07.21(68.01), UA.

⁴¹ Memo of 29.9.1952, X07.21(68.01), UA.

⁴² Letter from the Embassy of the Union of South Africa in Paris to UNESCO, 5.4.1955, X07.21(68.01), UA.

and in January 1960 there were, according to UNESCO, between 2000-2500 anti-Semitic incidents in about 40 countries.⁴³

The expressions of racial prejudice made it clear to the United Nations that action had to be taken, and in December 1962 the UN General Assembly adopted three resolutions on race. One of them requested the Human Rights Commission to draw up proposals for a convention on the elimination of all forms of racial discrimination and religious intolerance.⁴⁴

During the preparation of the convention UNESCO was asked to convene a panel of experts to re-examine the concept of race in the light of scientific advances of the previous 12 years and to make a new and updated statement on race. That happened in Moscow in 1964 and repeated the main points of the previous statements. A year later the UN International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination was adopted. In the wake of the ratification and subsequent implementation of the convention in national legislation, discrimination was criminalized, and to this very day the convention represents the principle legal text against racism and racial discrimination in UN member states.

A great story left untold

What had happened then – in the meantime – with UNESCO's other major project, namely Huxley, Needham and Febvre's attempt of constructing a collective memory of mankind and thereby integrate all cultures in a new world civilization?

Well, in the late 1940's and early 1950's the various UNESCO national commissions had warmly welcomed the project. The only objections had centred on whether the results would justify the great expenses or related to details that were supposed to take national demands and wishes into account, all of which Febvre characterized as the result of "the obstinacy with which so many representatives of so-called 'European' or 'Western' civilization regard the latter – their own – as the only true civilization".⁴⁵

To ensure the global approach the commission that should carry out the work decided to have it written by an entire group of specialists representing all continents. It was also decided to avoid national biases by appointing authors who were experts on periods that were different from the heyday of their own culture, and it was decided that the commission should be constantly enlarged to comprise additional members, to widen its geographical and cultural representation – which immediately gave it the enthusiastic support of countries like India, Pakistan and Iraq.⁴⁶

In the early days of July 1953 the commission even published the first issue of the *Journal of World History*, *Cahiers d'Histoire Mondiale* or *Cuadernos de Historia Mundial*, to give it the names of the three editions. The journal, edited by Lucien Febvre, made it possible for researchers of all kinds to help shape discussions on the design of the plan. Several did. And as time passed, thematic

⁴³ "Brief Summary of Interpretations Concerning the Recent Anti-Semitic Incidents", October 1960, 323.12 A 187, UA.

⁴⁴ UN resolution, no. 1779-1781, 7.12.1962, UNA.

⁴⁵ "Comments on the Plan", 1950, SCHM 8 and Report 5C/PRG/2, SCHM 7, 2.225, UA.

⁴⁶ Huxley (1970), p. 70; "The Seventh Session of the General Conference of UNESCO", 18.12.1952, SCHM 2, UA.

issues were added, often treating themes and parts of the world that had previously not been given much attention, such as the history of Africa.

But then a number of problems occurred – mostly due to the harsh reality of the Cold War.

Until the death of Joseph Stalin in March 1953, the Soviets had refused to have anything to do with UNESCO, but the Khrushchev administration inaugurated a reappraisal of USSR's foreign policy priorities and the country joined the organization in April 1954.⁴⁷

That was bad news for the chairman of the editorial committee, Ralph E. Turner from Yale University, who certainly wanted the commission to be international but never missed a chance of depicting politicized Marxist history-writing as the image of what the History of Mankind project was not. Now he feared that these historians would ask to join the commission. And they did. In November 1954 the commission received commitments from the Soviet delegates at UNESCO that the Soviet scholars were prepared to take “an active part in this important, interesting and valuable undertaking of UNESCO.”⁴⁸

The Soviet representative, A.A. Zvorikine [Зворыкин Анатолий Алексеевич] who was a professor at the Institute of History at the USSR Academy of Sciences in Moscow, arrived in Paris in January 1956 and was – despite Turner's objections – appointed Vice-President of the commission.

Zvorikine proved to be a pleasant man, liked by most members of the Commission but, of course, very much influenced by the system that had sent him. He explained that he and his Soviet colleagues had already been working on a series of detailed, in-depth comments on the plan, and he intended to return to Paris as soon as possible, at his own expense, to present them.⁴⁹

Turner, who feared that an alternative philosophy of history would change the basic approach of the entire project, informed Zvorikine that he and his colleagues could only expect the Commission to accept minor modifications at this advanced stage of the process. When Zvorikine later returned to Paris, it did also appear as if the Russian threat had been exaggerated, since the corrections only involved the inclusion of a few extra Russian names and reference works in the various volumes.⁵⁰

But the Soviet scientists would soon manage to remove the shine from the miracle of a truly international history of mankind. In November 1956, addressing Western ambassadors at a reception at the Polish embassy in Moscow, the Soviet leader, Nikita Khrushchev, made his dramatic claim. “Like it or not, history is on our side. We will bury you.” This was a shock to everyone present. Khrushchev later claimed that he had not been talking about nuclear war but about the historically determined victory of communism over capitalism.⁵¹

⁴⁷ Ilya V. Gaiduk: “L'Union soviétique et l'UNESCO pendant la guerre froide”, *60 ans d'histoire de l'UNESCO*. Paris: UNESCO (2007), p. 282.

⁴⁸ Letter from Ralph E. Turner to Guy S. Métraux, 19.10.1954 and “Fifth Plenary Meeting [UNESCO]”, 15.11.1954, SCHM 2, UA.

⁴⁹ Letter from Paulo E. de Berrêdo Carneiro to Julian Huxley, 31.1.1956, SCHM 17, UA.

⁵⁰ Answers from Louis Gottschalck and Caroline F. Ware on A.A. Zvorikine's comments, 1.6. and 10.7.1956, SCHM 1, UA; Morazé (2007), p. 183-184.

⁵¹ John Lewis Gaddis: *The Cold War: A New History*. New York: Penguin Press (2005), p. 84.

At almost the same time as this was happening, Turner received the first full manuscript of one of the volumes. The commission circulated it to their members and consultants, from where the authors then would receive comments that would be incorporated before the volume was prepared for publication in September 1957. But this time the Soviet comments were so voluminous that they verged on the absurd. The commission realized that there was no way that the authors could possibly comply with the deadline, and the commission's president had to go to UNESCO to ask for additional funds.⁵²

As UNESCO moved into its new headquarters of cement and glass on la Place de Fontenoy at the foot of the Eiffel Tower in November 1958, the History of Mankind project was in decline. Turner, this man of vigorous opinions and unbound energy, was furious at the sheer quantity of mainly Soviet objections and at the prospect of repeatedly having to ask the authors to change and reshape their contributions. Several authors had already died or resigned by this stage, causing severe delays to some of the volumes, and there were rumours that the early death of one of them had been provoked by the overwhelming amount of comments flooding his mailbox.⁵³

Eventually even the physically strong Turner was laid low by work and in late January 1959 he suffered two heart attacks and was hospitalized, and with Turner out of the picture the Soviet objections to the manuscripts reached their culmination point. This happened when the commission received the final manuscript for Volume 6, covering the 20th century. Only a few days after the manuscript had been handed over to the Soviet scholars, Zvorikine and his colleagues returned a comprehensive critical review – a total of 500 pages of objections to the treatment of Communism, of technological developments in the USSR, of the Soviet economy and political system – not to mention a very detailed guideline for the re-writing of the entire manuscript.⁵⁴

It was difficult to see how to reach agreement. The American author-editor felt obliged to incorporate into her text “contra-notes” to her Soviet colleagues’ notes, which they tried to prevent, and when they failed they demanded space for notes to the author’s notes.⁵⁵

Therefore the first volume of the work was not published before June 1963. To UNESCO and the members of the Commission it was a great relief, and even more so as it turned out that the reviewers treated the volume kindly.

Behind the scenes the commission was still awaiting half of the final manuscripts, of which one was way behind schedule. Only in 1965 was the second volume released, and this was accompanied by positive reviews in some newspapers, but this time also by rather more critical comment. This was particularly the case in the influential *New York Times*, whose reviewer characterized the volume as a history with no soul, a mistaken enterprise with a

⁵² “Notes made by G.S. Métraux in the course of several meetings held with Mr. R. Williams of Little, Brown & Co. (February-March 1957)”, SCHM 1, UA.

⁵³ Charles Morazé: *Un historien engage: Mémoires*. Paris: Fayard (2007), p. 183; Memo from Guy S. Métraux to the International Commission, 14.10.1964, SCHM 2, UA and letter from Julian Huxley to Guy S. Métraux, 6.11.1964, Box 37, RU.

⁵⁴ “Résolution adoptée par le Bureau au Cours de sa XVème reunion”, 27.-28.2.1961, SCHM 2; Letter from Julian Huxley to Paulo E. de Berrêdo Carneiro, 17.4.1961, SCHM 17, UA.

⁵⁵ Letters from Guy S. Métraux to Paulo E. de Berrêdo Carneiro, 18.3. and 30.3.1965, SCHM 2, UA.

lot of distracting notes. “The total effect is of an encyclopaedia gone berserk, or resorted by a deficient computer,” the reviewer claimed, concluding that it was altogether “a great story left untold”.⁵⁶ The review surprised the members of the commission, and, according to the commission’s Secretary-General, some American scholars regarded it as “one of the most savage reviews ever published in the *New York Times*”.⁵⁷ The review had the immediate and negative consequence that a number of publishers in various countries withdrew from their initial agreement to publish the entire work in their respective languages.

In the following years volume by volume was published, and the criticism grew no less trenchant as time went, despite the fact that reviewers could never agree on alternative approaches to the writing of a global history of mankind. Nevertheless the Commission managed to have the volumes published in translation in several languages. In 1967 the first volume in French appeared, and one year later came the first versions in Serbo-Croat, Slovene, Spanish, Russian, Hebrew, Arabic, Dutch and Japanese. The last volume of the *History of Mankind* was published in 1976.

For its time – not the time of its publication but that of its long preparation – the *History of Mankind* stands as the first truly international account of the history of mankind. But achieving “truth” through majority voting and relying on the ponderous movement of official envelopes to and from the far reaches of the globe, involving more than 1,000 sometimes unwilling scholars, had caused major delays, and, when the work was finally released, it had already passed its own sell-by date.

The hard work barely had a fraction of the impact that some of them had envisioned in wake of Turner’s claim that it was going to be the most influential history book ever written. Therefore the final version of *History of Mankind* does not play a role today as an example for imitation but rather as a monument of a universalism that did not quite succeed – unlike UNESCO’s initiatives on race.

But it would nevertheless be unfair to regard the entire process leading up to the publication in that perspective, groundbreaking as it was as the first trial of Euro-centrism after World War II. It is rather meaningful to characterize the process as the starting point of the post-war trend of writing “global history” (the history of globalization) due to the early start of the entire project and its ambition of focusing on “cultural exchanges and transmissions”, but also due to the fact that UNESCO maintained the ambition of writing history with global approach in wake of this first major attempt – including the revised and updated edition, *History of Humanity* (1994-2005) and the *General History of Africa* (1985-1995) – not to mention the invention of the so-called “World Heritage List” which was a direct outcome of the project and which founds the basis of what is probably UNESCO’s most widely known activity today.

⁵⁶ J.H. Plumb: “A Great Story Left Untold”, *New York Times*, 1.8.1965.

⁵⁷ Memo from Guy S. Métraux to the members of the International Commission, 5.10.1965, SCHM 2, UA.