# Thinking the Universal from the Periphery: Anténor Firmin (1850-1911) and Nikolai Marr (1865-1934) on Language, Race, and Culture

by

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**List of Illustrations**

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**Declaration**

Select material included in Chapter 1 of the present thesis has appeared in the following publications:

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**Abstract**

Comparing the centre to the periphery is a well-established trope in the history of ideas as in other fields of enquiry. This thesis adopts a different approach. It examines the work of two intellectuals from parts of the world deemed 'peripheral' whose intellectual contribution sought to transcend their condition of peripherality by bypassing the centre: the Haitian historian, anthropologist, and public intellectual Joseph Anténor Firmin (1850-1911) and the Georgian philologist, archaeologist, and philosopher of language Nikolai Marr (1865-1934). By comparing writers from such far-removed parts of the world who inhabited the same historical period, I intend to offer an alternative to the diffusionist model of intellectual history, in which concepts are traced from their emergence in Europe to their application in the rest of the world. The comparison undertaken in this thesis follows different vectors in the communication of philosophical ideas. This is highly fitting because Firmin and Marr devoted themselves to studying evolution and historical development in a manner designed to challenge the belief that certain peoples and cultures are the driving force of history while others are destined to languish behind. Strikingly, they framed their respective projects in the spirit of universalism, which is to say they were committed to the universal action of evolutionary law common to all societies. Through the uniform application of developmental law, Firmin and Marr sought to incorporate all societies as equal parties in global development, irrespective of the racial (Firmin) and linguistic (Marr) exclusion they may have been subject to. I begin by examining the parallel and overlapping ways in which Firmin and Marr constructed their respective world-historical schemes and how they attempted to reconcile the existence of multiple developmental trajectories within a single evolutionary masterplan. I then examine how changing political circumstances in both their lives challenged and modified these commitments.

## Introduction

> Le Caucasien peut se croire né pour dominer l'univers. Mais que faut-il pour le ramener au sentiment de la réalité. Il suffira de lui rappeler combien chétifs, ignorants et vicieux ont été ses ancêtres sur cette même terre devenue aujourd'hui le centre des lumières. *Quam pater habuit sortem, eam tibi memoret!* pourrait-on lui répéter.
>
> - A. Firmin[1]

> Japhetic linguistics is above all a theory of living languages, languages which up to now have been persecuted by scholarship or at best have been left to languish on its fringes, much as the peoples who speak them have languished on the fringes of enlightenment or have remained in total darkness until the October Revolution.
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> - N. Marr[2]

This thesis examines the work of two intellectuals from the colonial periphery of Europe and America who challenged the philosophical basis of empire: the Haitian historian, anthropologist, and public intellectual Joseph Anténor Firmin (1850-1911), and the Georgian philologist, archaeologist, and philosopher of language Nikolai Jakovlevič Marr (1865-1934). Both writers could be said to represents parts of the world marginalized by colonialism and cloaked in obscurity by the Western imaginary. Both had a critical understanding of the scholarly debates in linguistics, anthropology, archaeology, and evolutionary biology which unfolded around them and in which they themselves actively participated. Although they engaged in debates which often differed in their specifics, both thinkers attempted to prove that the expansion of reason, liberation and civilization across the globe was not a

[1] Anténor Firmin. *De l'Égalité des races humaines: Anthropologie positive* (Paris: Cotillon, 1885), pp. 579-580.
[2] Nikolaj Marr, 'Predislovie', in *Po ėtapam razvytija jafetičeskoj teorii* (Moscow and Leningrad: Naučno-issledovatel'skij institut ėtničeskikh i nacional'nykh kul'tur narodov vostoka SSSR, 1926a), pp. i-vii (p. vi).

process led solely by the West. They both thought that the conceptual apparatus of Western scholarship was indeed up to the task of describing the world. Western scholarly discourse, however, was in their eyes contaminated with racism, national chauvinism, and other forms of prejudice. Their solution was to remodel the Western tradition which they inherited: to wrest it from the hands of its erstwhile masters and remould it to serve not the narrative of Euro-American pre-eminence but the interests of a decolonized world devoid of any binary opposition between centre and periphery.

Both thinkers viewed history as a single unified process which unfolded everywhere according to the same laws and did not privilege any individual race, ethnicity, or culture above the others. In this regard they borrowed heavily from theories of world history developed by certain European thinkers in the Enlightenment and their nineteenth-century followers: Saint-Simonians, with their secular faith in science and progress, and early sociologists such as Herbert Spencer, who thought that the inevitable force of progress would allow all societies to overcome tyranny and superstition.[3] The appeal that these theories held was that they suggested that all societies were capable of progressing and that they could do so on their own initiative. Accordingly, Firmin and Marr attempted to illustrate how social evolution unfolded in separate parts of the world according to a universal set of laws. In their view, civilization did not originate in any one location, nor was it transmitted through the world by conquest or cultural diffusion. Instead, it evolved in multiple places independently from one another. In this respect, their thinking invites comparison with Claude Lévi-Strauss' antiracist writings for UNESCO, itself a universalist project, and his rejection of the correlation of civilizational attainment with biological difference combined with his argument that civilization emerged in multiple parts of the world: 'l'humanité […] ne se développe pas sous le régime d'une uniforme monotonie, mais à travers des modes extraordinairement diversifiés de sociétés et de civilisations'.[4] Furthermore, the existence of comparable cultural or

[3] For Enlightenment views of progress and civilization, see Robert J. C. Young, *Colonial Desire: Hybridity in Theory, Culture and Race* (London and New York: Routledge, 1995), pp. 30-3; for Saint-Simonians, see D. G. Charlton, *Secular Religion in France 1815-1870*, 2nd edn (London and New York: Oxford University Press for the University of Hull, 1970), pp. 70-1; for Spencer, see J. W. Burrow, *Evolution and Society: A Study in Victorian Social Theory* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1968), pp. 187-8.

[4] Claude Lévi-Strauss, *Race et histoire* [1952] (Paris: Gallimard, 2007), p. 9

linguistic forms in different parts of the world did not, so Firmin and Marr argued, necessarily imply descent from a common ancestor but evidenced, rather, the universal action of evolutionary law common to all human civilizations. This conception of historical law was intended to repudiate views which had become more prevalent over the course of the nineteenth century which saw civilization as emanating solely from Europe, proceeding outwards in waves of conquest and cultural diffusion. According to Firmin and Marr, Western scholarship had misrecognized or deliberately distorted the universal principles of historical development, which were intrinsically egalitarian, but which had come been interpreted as favouring the ascendancy of the West. The solution they prescribed was a return to a universalist understanding of history, a theme they pursued in their work which lends it its distinctiveness and interest.

Because of their faith in progress, historical law, and universalism, Firmin and Marr are not easily reconcilable with the aims and procedures of postcolonial thought. The attempt to synthesize a universal account of social evolution encompassing all varieties of culture has been a major preoccupation of Western thinkers since at least the eighteenth century.[5] Such accounts have come under attack for attempting to impose a Eurocentric interpretative frame on the world. Even at the time that Firmin and Marr were active, many other intellectuals from marginalized parts of the world thought that the best way to counter Eurocentrism was to dispense with universalism and assert the fundamental difference between races and cultures in a manner that was incompatible with such universalist programmes as Marxism. Instances of this would include the Black Zionism of Marcus Garvey, with its assertion of national self-determination and hostility to racial mixing, Négritude (a movement whose 'original sin', as identified by Haitian Marxist philosopher and poet René Despestre, lay in being beholden to anthropology, which resulted in its belief that ethnic descent rather than geographical, social, or economic factors, accounted for the cultural development of Caribbean and South American countries), as well as movements that sought to generate transnational solidarity along cultural rather than racial lines: Russian émigrés who defined 'Eurasia' in opposition to the materialist and utilitarian West or writers from the Spanish Americas who opposed

[5] Cf. George W. Stocking, *Victorian Anthropology* (New York: The Free Press, 1987), pp. 10-19.

'Latin' America to 'Anglo-Saxon' America on precisely the same grounds.[6] The existence of irreconcilable cultural difference provided the basis for asserting that non-Western societies were not subject to a European framework of values and could therefore not be compared to the West and found wanting. The rejection of universalism, along with claims of epistemic relativity, have characterized many influential contributions to the modern-day field of postcolonial and decolonial thought.

Reading Firmin and Marr allows us to historicize concepts familiar to us in present-day debates surrounding decolonization. The problem of reconciling universalism with cultural difference remains unresolved. Many influential attempts in the twentieth century at rejecting Eurocentric modernity have advanced an essentialized view of cultural difference and have thus merely recapitulated the terms of debate of previous generations.[7] In their own lifetimes, Firmin and Marr represent a viewpoint that was eclipsed by nationalist discourse. I explore them alongside their European interlocutors, but also in the context of marginalized intellectuals who produced accounts of cultural difference more immediately recognizable to us today. The debates in which they were involved offer us a prism through which to view the intertwined history of nationalism and epistemic relativism as two highly fraught attempts to oppose the global hegemony of Western Europe and North America.

It is not my intention to redeem Firmin and Marr from obscurity by claiming that they speak to us directly in the present, or that their work represents a coherent alternative to the orthodoxies of today. They were complex figures, frequently self-contradictory, and despite sharing much in common were unaware of each other's existence. They proposed novel, sometimes radical, reformulations about prevailing ideas about race, language, and history. Yet they did not stand outside of the discourse of the time; they were embedded in it. This thesis is both a portrait of two

[6] For Garvey, see Robert J.C. Young, *Postcolonialism: An Historical Introduction* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2001), pp. 219-20. René Depestre, *Bonjour et adieu à la négritude; suivi de, Travaux d'identité: Essais* (Paris: Seghers, 1989, p. 84. For 'Eurasianists', see Patrick Sériot, *Structure and the Whole: East, West and Non-Darwinian Biology in the Origins of Structural Linguistics*, trans. by Amy Jacobs-Colas (Boston: De Gruyter Mouton, 2014), p. 28; for Latin America cultural values, see Aims McGuiness, 'Searching for 'Latin America': Race and Sovereignty in the Americas in the 1850s', in *Race and Nation in Modern Latin America*, ed. by Nancy P. Appelbaum, Anne S. Macpherson, and Karin Alejandra Rosemblatt (Chapel Hill and London: University of North Carolina Press, 2003), pp. 87-107 (p. 100).

[7] Cf. Charles Hatfield, *The Limits of Identity: Politics and Poetics in Latin America* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2015), p. 48.

scholars and an excavation of dominant ideologies of empire and the conceptual framework on which they rested—conceptual frameworks tested to breaking point by Firmin and Marr.

## Biographical Overview

Joseph Anténor Firmin was born in the town of Cap-Haïtien on the country's northern coast in 1850.[8] Although hailing from a humble background—his father was a tailor—Anténor's parents enrolled him in the local classical lycée. He acquired a solid grounding in Latin and Greek; later on, a job with a foreign shipping agent gave him the opportunity to learn German.[9] After training as a lawyer, Firmin entered politics where he pursued a tumultuous career as a member of the Parti Libéral. When his party was defeated in an election by the Nationalists in 1884, he spent several years in Paris. This time was formative for two reasons: his encounter with European racial prejudice spurred him to write the work for which he is most famous, *De l'Égalité des races humaines*; while in Paris he became affiliated with a circle of Latin American intellectuals campaigning for the independence of Cuba and Puerto Rico from Spain. A reversal of political fortunes saw him return to Haiti and assume a government position. Against intense pressure from the United States, Firmin refused to agree to a concession which would have allowed the construction of a naval coaling station in the Môle Saint-Nicolas. However, his fortunes did not last. Firmin accrued a large base of political support for his reformist platform and attempt to narrow the gap between the ruling elites and the mass of the population.[10] However, and after a failed bid for presidency in 1902 he was forced into exile on the island of Saint Thomas.

Nikolai Jakovlevič Marr (or, to give him his Georgian name, Niko Mari) was born in 1865 in the village of Chokhatauri in the Kutaisi Governorate of the Russian

[8] Cf. Jean Price-Mars, *Anténor Firmin* (Port-au-Prince: Imprimerie Séminaire adventiste, 1964), Laurent Dubois, *Haiti: The Aftershocks of History* (New York: Picador, 2012), pp. 165-203.
[9] Price-Mars 1964, p. 56.
[10] Celucien L. Joseph, 'Forms of Firminism: Understanding Joseph Anténor Firmin', in *Reconstructing the Social Sciences and Humanities: Anténor Firmin, Western Intellectual Tradition, and Black Atlantic Tradition*, ed. by Celucien L. Joseph and Paul C. Mocombe (New York and London: Routledge, 2021), pp. 86-120 (pp. 89-90).

Empire, in a region bordering the Black Sea and the Ottoman frontier.[11] His father, a Scottish botanist and tea plantation manager from Lewisham, died when he was young, and so it fell to Niko's mother, a Georgian of humble means, to ensure that he attended the prestigious Gimnazia in Kutaisi. Niko's brilliance with languages afforded him the chance to study in St Petersburg where he eventually became a professor of Oriental Studies, specializing in Armenian. He distinguished himself through his careful philological work on ecclesiastical texts and through the archaeological excavations he led at the medieval Armenian city of Ani. However, he devoted himself to advancing hypotheses of linguistic origin for the Caucasus which ran counter to the prevailing Indo-European comparative school. Although not directly involved in the Russian revolution, Marr successfully navigated the new political circumstances to advance his career. His theories, which by this point amounted to a global account of language origins, became official doctrine under Stalin. However, although Marr died at the height of his influence, his theories fell from grace in 1950 when they were publicly discredited by Stalin.

## Universalism and its Discontents

The Enlightenment's concept of universalism, comprising the belief that human nature is everywhere the same despite superficial local differences and the conception of History as a single progressive force reconciling and uniting all individual national histories, has been irreparably compromised by its association with imperialism. Ever since the publication of Horkheimer and Adorno's *Dialectic of Enlightenment* (1947), the faculty of reason so celebrated by Kant and other enlightenment thinkers, has been viewed as perilously prone to devolving into totalitarianism.[12] Concurrently with this post-Second World War reckoning with the

[11] V. A. Mikhankova, *Nikolaj Jakovlevič Marr. Očerk ego žizni i naučnoj dejatel'nosti*, 3rd edn (Moscow and Leningrad: Akademija Nauk, 1949); Donald Rayfield, 'Nikolai Marr—a talk by Donald Rayfield 17 February' (2015)
< http://www.britishgeorgiansociety.org/nokolai-marr-a-talk-by-donald-rayfield-17-february/ > [Accessed 18 January 2021].

[12] Any attempt at a pithy summary of Horkheimer and Adorno's principal thesis will fall short of the opening to their work: 'Seit je hat Aufklärung im umfassendsten Sinn fortschreitenden Denkens das Ziel verfolgt, von den Menschen die Furcht zu nehmen und sie als Herren einzusetzen. Aber die vollends aufgeklärte Erde strahlt um Zeichen triumphalen Unheils.' Max Horkheimer and Theodor W.

excesses of Enlightenment rationality, anti-colonial thinkers pointed out that European powers had built and consolidated their empires in the spirit of upholding universal human values. The complicity between universalism and empire is nowhere more apparent than in France's colonial ideology of *mission civilisatrice* which was frequently invoked as a moral justification for the imperial expansion undertaken by the Third Republic.[13] In common with the other imperial powers, France claimed that its colonization of far-flung parts of the world served the humanitarian end of spreading civilization among the benighted races. But unlike the British Empire, whose agents cultivated an aloof indifference towards their culturally and racially 'other' colonial subjects, France presented its mode of colonizing as ultimately seeking to erase the difference between coloniser and colonised through the medium of education, such that over time the latter would attain the same degree of civilization as the former. [14] The architects of late French Empire, which was designed to be a colour-blind meritocracy, were in this sense the heirs of the revolutionaries of 1789 and their proclamation of the unity of the human race.

The case of French imperialism does not call into question universalism simply because its humanitarian and egalitarian ideals served as a cynical mask for colonial expansion. Rather, the internal logic of *mission civilisatrice* reveals a problem attendant upon any attempt to formulate broad enough terms to unify the diversity of human societies and historical experiences. With the best will in the world, the values of the universal must abstract local particulars, either by bracketing them out or by suppressing them. Defining values which can apply universally across the full diversity of human individuals, societies, and histories means rejecting certain differences as inconsequential to the greater unity which is being sought. French imperial ideology in theory rejected racial difference as in any way material to the question of whether different human societies could acquire civilization. It affirmed that they all could, through the medium of French education. At the same time, however, this ideology also rejected the legitimacy of non-French

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Adorno, *Dialektik der Aufklärung: Philosophische Fragmente*, 2nd edn (Frankfurt/Main: Fischer, 1969), p.9.

[13] That French colonial administrators were convinced that their mission answered a moral imperative beyond the material interest of France is well attested to by Alice L. Conklin, *A Mission to Civilize: The Republican Idea of Empire in France and West Africa, 1895-1930* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1997), p. 52.

[14] Cf. Young 2001, pp. 25-34.

cultural forms, belief systems, social organizations, and languages as having any claim of kinship with the ideal of humanity. These all had to fall by the wayside in the interest of propagating universal, which is to say French, civilization. Establishing a universal set of values risks violently negating difference and imposing uniformity. And many writers who had experienced French colonialism at first hand readily intuited the consistency between the celebration of universal values and the imposition of colonial violence.[15]

This same charge of negating difference in the name of the universal has been repeatedly levelled at Marxism, an avowedly anti-imperialist theory which served as a guiding ideology for struggles of colonial liberation throughout much of the twentieth century. Marxism's emphasis on conflict as the motor of history and its foregrounding of the historical agency of the oppressed and marginalized made it a powerful antidote to the triumphalist accounts of national and imperial supremacy. Yet by claiming to offer a unified global theory of history, reducible to the mechanisms of class antagonism and shifts of the mode of production, Marxism has been accused of an oversimplification or outright denial of a great variety of historical experiences and processes in the name of achieving theoretical comprehensiveness and closure. Because Marx and Engels developed their theory of class formation on the basis of European revolutionary movements of the nineteenth century, Marxist studies of historical processes beyond Europe have risked reducing the actors involved to mere reflections of a European precedent or, if they did not conform, delegitimizing their struggle and consigning them to the same position outside of history occupied by the Lumpenproletariat, the marginal social groupings said to lack class consciousness and which could not be 'assimilated' to the proletariat.[16] Conversely, many members of non-European and non-white intelligentsias came to reject Marxism and Communism after having initially adopted these positions because they no longer saw the exclusive lens of class struggle as commensurate to the historical forces that applied to societies under colonialism or to the demands of racial liberation.[17] Marxism's teleology, which

[15] George Ciccariello-Maher, *Decolonizing Dialectics* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2017), p. 109.
[16] Robert J.C. Young, *White Mythologies: Writing History and the West* (London and New York: Routledge, 1990), p. 5.
[17] Cedric J. Robinson, *Black Marxism: The Making of the Black Radical Tradition*, 3rd edn (London: Penguin, 2021), pp. 183-4; Ciccariello-Maher 2017, p. 12.

foresees a succession of historical stages leading to an eventual resolution of difference in the future classless society, has not sat easily with the burgeoning fault lines opened up over the course of decolonization, whose multiplicity threatened the unitary nature of the historical process.

The tense relationship between unity and diversity in Marxist thinking is observable in the nationalities policy of the Soviet Union, a state which declared itself the scourge of imperialism globally, but which adopted the centralized approach of a colonial power to steer the national and ethnic struggles unfolding within its borders down an appropriately dialectical track. Out of the ruins of the tsarist empire a daunting array of political movements found expression that challenged the centrality of European modernity and colonial rule, ranging from romantic nationalists to revolutionary socialists, along with Pan-Turkism and Pan-Islamism.[18] The Bolsheviks had to devise a means of consolidating their rule and channelling this political energy away from separatism and towards the creation of a community of nations within a single political union. This entailed removing separatist elements and training national cadres from the peripheries capable of participating in union-level politics. Above all it meant engineering national identity through the promotion of minority languages and cultural institutions with the aim of propelling 'backwards' ethnicities into the historical phase of the nation as a prerequisite to subsequently transcending the nation in communism. The Soviet leaders saw themselves in a position to accelerate the teleological historical process or, in Stalin's words, to cause national culture to 'exhaust itself', clearing the path for international socialist culture.[19] Their accommodation of ethnic and national pluralism did much to undo the hierarchies imposed by tsarist rule and avoided the negation of difference which would have occurred had the Bolsheviks sought to engineer communism through the assimilation of minorities to Russian culture. Yet their unilinear developmental model, in which the backward nationalities were to

[18] For the Soviet co-opting of earlier reformist movements in the Caucasus and Central Asia, see Ingeborg Baldauf, *Schriftreform und Schriftwechsel bei den muslimischen Russland- und Sowjettürken (1850-1937): Ein Symptom ideengeschichtlicher und kulturpolitischer Entwicklungen* (Budapest: Akadémiai Kiadó, 1993), pp. 461-92.
[19] Terry Martin, *The Affirmative Action Empire: Nations and Nationalism in the Soviet Union, 1923-1939* (Ithaca, NY and London: Cornell University Press, 2001), p. 5.

emulate the industrialized portions of the union, ultimately sought uniformity.[20] In an ironic twist, the system of Soviet internationalism resembled the revolutionary force of the bourgeoisie as evoked in the Communist Manifesto: 'it compels all nations, on pain of extinction, to adopt the bourgeois mode of production […] In one word, it creates a world after its own image.'[21]

The problem with universalism, namely its justification of violent coercion in the name of achieving a higher end, has been traced back to the operation of Western reason itself which, for a long period of its existence, has been characterised by an approach to the world in which acquiring knowledge of the unknown means neutralizing its difference and forcefully assimilating it to the worldview of the Western mind. This neutralization of difference as a condition of knowing is observable in attempts to categorize objects and peoples in which difference is conceived in terms of degrees of separation between self and other, rather than an absolute difference which would accord autonomy to the other but which, under the terms of Western reason, would amount to treating it as unknowable.[22] Marxism is no less exempt from this charge than other bodies of knowledge more directly amenable to colonial rule.

Anthropology, broadly construed, has since its inception attempted to come to terms with the existence of cultural difference without simply affirming the racial and cultural superiority of Europeans over all other peoples; the impulse toward 'cultural relativism' goes back at least as far as Johann Gottfried Herder.[23] However, it has struggled to transcend its epistemological limits: either in the approach to difference of evolutionary anthropology, treating 'primitive' cultural practices as living survivals of anterior stages of development already traversed by the European mind, or in the cultural relativism of early twentieth century ethnographers, who acknowledged an incommensurate difference between non-Western societies and themselves, but who believed that their own point of view was the neutral universal

[20] Soviet ethnographers and national builders who advocated the preservation of cultural difference were not always able to prevail against the countervailing forces of centralization and cultural assimilation to Russia. Ibid, pp. 403-14.
[21] Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, 'Manifesto of the Communist Party', in *The Portable Karl Marx*, ed. and trans. by Eugene Kamenka (New York: Penguin, 1983), pp 203-241 (p. 208).
[22] Young 1990, p. 6. Thus, Said will characterize 'Orientalism' as a '*will* or *intention* to understand, in some cases to control, manipulate, even to incorporate, what is a manifestly different (or alternative and novel) world'. Edward W. Said, *Orientalism* (New York: Vintage, 1979), p. 12.
[23] Stocking 1987, p.20.

one through which the belief system of the 'other' could be recuperated in its totality and interpreted to the reader.[24]

Marxism likewise has been accused of adhering to an epistemological model in which the (European) self serves as the measure for approaching the other. The accusations of reductiveness levelled at Marxism which we have discussed have been attributed to the influence of Hegel. Hegel was unabashedly Eurocentric in his celebration of Protestantism and Northern European society as the culmination of history. The process of self-realization which human reason, according to Hegel, had to traverse before arriving at this point has been characterised as an 'expropriation and incorporation of the other' which mimics colonialism.[25] Marx would initially seem exempt from the charge of trumpeting European reason and its capacity to unify and assimilate the world into itself. He departs radically from Hegel by making the expansion of productive power be the motor of history and not the self-emancipation of consciousness.[26] How privileged men judge their history is for Marx not a reliable basis for the historian to judge the epoch in question.[27] However, the Marxist reduction of history to class struggle, especially when it comes to non-European history, has been seen to encapsulate the negative features of Hegelian thought, with its striving to assimilate difference into unity. As argued by George Ciccariello-Maher, it has been seen as the task of thinkers from the margins to address these deficiencies, to break from the 'straightjacketed view of a dialectical difference that refuses or subsumes diversity', thereby inaugurating a non-teleological dialectics which is energized by the 'subversive and unpredictable remainder' excluded by Western Marxism.[28]

However, we are getting ahead of ourselves. We need to dwell a little longer on the question of why Western philosophical systems have been argued to exclude non-Western thinkers who might want to appropriate them for their own ends. The ability to reconfigure dialectical reason, thereby making it more accommodating of

[24] Ibid, pp. 144-85; James Clifford, *The Predicament of Culture: Twentieth-Century Ethnography, Literature, and Art* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1988), pp. 26-32.
[25] Young 1990, p. 3.
[26] This is necessarily a highly compressed account of Hegel, Marx, and the former's influence on the latter. For an analytical study of this question, see G.A. Cohen, *Karl Marx's Theory of History: A Defence* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1978), pp. 1-27.
[27] Ibid, p. 22.
[28] Ciccariello-Maher 2017, p. 11.

difference than had been shown by its most famous Western exponents, assumes the possibility of parsing out the useful from the harmful features of a system of thought. However, many postcolonial writers argue that Western systems of philosophy and theories of history do not function primarily as sets of discrete propositions that can be adopted, rejected, or modified individually, but rather as totalizing systems of representation created by the West and imposed on the world. Rather than an ideological neutral interpretative frame, Western *discourse* is seen as a cloak which dissimulates a European epistemic will to power.[29]

I am alluding to the work of several historians of Western scholarship on the Near East, Africa, and Latin America who have examined the ways in which European knowledge of other parts of the world was not simply descriptive but rather constitutive of the reality it purported to represent. This was the central insight of Edward Said's *Orientalism*, a book whose object was the dense, evolving, self-referential discursive web which constituted the Western discipline of knowledge about the regions termed 'Orient'. Said's aim was to make visible 'that created consistency, that regular constellation of ideas' of Orientalist discourse manifesting itself across multiple textual genres even in the absence of a direct political agenda.[30] The discursive function of orientalism as understood by Said was to offer a system which self-referentially justified a conventional representation of the Near East without needing to refer to empirical evidence. Indeed, Said deliberately set out not to challenge Orientalism via reference to the reality of the Orient, but instead to trace 'exteriority' of the discourse insofar as it functions autonomously from the object it refers to.[31] In parallel with Said, other scholars have subjected the evolving Western discourses of knowledge about the world to archaeological investigation. Across numerous works, and famously in *The Invention of Africa*, V. Y. Mudimbe has excavated the 'geography of discourse' by which Western anthropology constituted Africa as an object of study, investing the continent with an imaginate charge which exceeds the uniform spatial plane laid down by the geographer.[32] Although crucially rejecting a monolithic treatment of European epistemological dominance over

[29] Cf. Said 1979, pp. 22-3.
[30] Ibid, p. 5.
[31] Cf. Young 1990, pp. 129-32.
[32] Pierre-Philippe Fraiture, *V. Y. Mudimbe: Undisciplined Africanism* (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2013), pp. 16-17.

Africa, Mudimbe has investigated ways in which European discourse has mediated empirical observation ('the explorer's text is not epistemologically inventive. It follows a path prescribed by tradition').[33] Another contribution to the archaeology of Western area studies is Walter Mignolo's *The Idea of Latin America*, a book whose title indicates its geographical scope and theoretical affinities. Mignolo argues that in naming the continent after its 'discovery', European colonists erased the prior history of the 'New World' and grafted it onto an existing Biblical geography, based on the lineage of Noah, which located Europe alongside Asia and Africa.[34] The 'discovery' of the Americas—or Indias Occidentales—merely continued Europe's providential westward expansion begun by the continent's Noetic ancestor Japheth, whose name seemingly held a providential meaning: 'Japheth means 'width', for from him were born the pagan nations, and because wide is the multitude of believers from among the gentiles'.[35] By establishing a new western periphery, this 'discovery' permitted Europe (which was formerly west of Jerusalem) to become the centre 'from which and where the rest of the world can be described, classified, understood, and 'improved.''[36] Mignolo provocatively suggests that without this initial concretization of 'Occidentalism', Europe would not have been able to conceive of an Orient over which to assert its mastery in the manner described by Said.[37]

These important theoretical works all suggest that Western discourse about the non-Western world functioned in semi-autonomy from its object of study; that the delineation of the world's geographic regions served the interests of simplification, of creating manageable totalities out of what would have been unmanageable heterogeneity; that the merging of separate histories into one single world history, in which Europe was accorded pride of place, obeyed a colonial logic of rationalization which sought to unify the world by constructing peripheral zones around a European core. This European core served as the privileged locus from which the rest of the world could be interpreted. The legacy of colonialism is, therefore, partly epistemological, insofar as the dominant scholarly paradigms are

[33] V. Y. Mudimbe, *The Invention of Africa: Gnosis, Philosophy, and the Order of Knowledge* (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1988), p. 16.
[34] Walter D. Mignolo, *The Idea of Latin America* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2005), pp. 22-26.
[35] Isidore of Seville, *The Etymologies of Isidore of Seville*, ed. and trans. by Stephen A. Barney (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), p. 163; Mignolo 2005, pp. 34-35, 38.
[36] Mignolo 2005, p. 36
[37] Ibid, p. 36.

those created by the West. Western scholarly discourse functions hermetically in its detachment from the material reality it purports to represent. The position of standing inside the discourse as its agent is withheld from figures on the periphery because they are not conceived of as thinking subjects capable of knowing the world. According to an important early work of critique by Said's mentor Anouar Abdel-Malek, Orientalism established a taxonomy of human difference which only the European as objective, universal, knowing subject can transcend:

> we will have a homo Sinicus, a homo Arabicus (and why not a homo Aegypticus, etc.), a homo Africanus, the man—the 'normal man', it is understood—being the European man of the historical period, that is, since Greek antiquity.[38]

This would seem to suggest that a non-Western figure cannot engage in debate on the same terms with the West, or, if they do, they must adopt the same violently normative viewpoint of the West in order to transcend their object status.

The discursive functioning of Western thought implies limited options for resisting it from the peripheries. If intellectuals outside the colonial centres of power intended to critique European imperialism, they were constrained to work within the parameters of Western thought, which meant either being marginalized by it or becoming ideologically complicit with its structures of domination. Attempts to challenge European racial typologies have often been fraught because, while seeking to invest positive values in races viewed as inferior, they have left the hierarchical framework and correlation of intellectual and cultural aptitudes with race adopted by European scholars intact. These perils and complicities are demonstrated by Mudimbe's iconoclastic reading of the early Pan-Africanist Edward Wilmot Blyden. An advocate of the 'back to Africa' model of emancipation, Blyden himself migrated from Saint Thomas to Sierra Leone. Hailed by Léopold Sédar Senghor as a precursor to *Négritude*, celebrated by others as the intellectual forefather of Pan-Africanism, closer scrutiny of his work reveals Blyden to be highly contradictory and, in Mudimbe's assessment, beholden to an 'axiomatic' discourse based around 'a racial opposition (white vs. black), a cultural confrontation (civilized vs. savage) and a

[38] Anouar Abdel-Malek, 'Orientalism in Crisis', *Diogenes* 44 (1963), 102-40 (pp. 107-8); as quoted in Partha Chatterjee, *Nationalist Thought and the Colonial World: A Derivative Discourse* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1993), p. 37.

religious distance (Christianity vs. paganism).'[39] Blyden is one of several figures we will examine who, while critical of colonialism, fell into the trap of simply embracing the axiomatically repudiated terms of Western thought without challenging the epistemic structure which led to these terms being repudiated in the first place.

If adopting a Western mode of thought is so perilous, another form of resistance may be to subvert Western discourse from within. An approach to studying indirect and subversive disruptions to dominant discourse has allowed scholars to recuperate forms of passive resistance that might otherwise go unnoticed by the intellectual-historical record. Homi K. Bhabha's work on the ambivalence of colonial discourse suggests that, contrary to Said, it is never fully mastered by the colonist and is highly vulnerable to unsettling parody and repetition on the part of the colonized.[40] If Said treats discourse as something 'massive' and 'dense', for Bhabha it manifests as a risky performance.[41] This performance can be challenged through marginal actions of mimicry, in which 'the words of the master become the site of hybridity'.[42] Firmin and Marr do occasionally unsettle and parody dominant discourse by restating its terms in an off-kilter manner, but this could most accurately be described as a tactical exercise which does not characterise their work as a whole.

A more assertive challenge to Western discursive hegemony would be to embrace 'epistemic relativism', which is the claim that systems of knowledge are limited in their applicability to defined cultural and geographic locales. No epistemological system would therefore possess a legitimate claim on universal applicability to the exclusion of other systems of thought comprising the global ecosystem of knowledge. Western thought would thus be a legitimate form of understanding the world within the confines of Europe but would lose its legitimacy the moment it oversteps the mark when by presuming to explain histories and cultures outside of its geographical remit.[43] The approach of epistemic relativism is

[39] Mudimbe 1988, pp. 98-9, 129.
[40] Young 1990, pp. 140-145.
[41] Said 1979, p. 20.
[42] Homi K. Bhabha, *The Location of Culture* (London and New York: Routledge, 1994), p. 162. As quoted by Young 1990, p. 149.
[43] Kuan-Hsing Chen suggests that European thought can be redeemed from its universalist hubris if we approach it not as a system for understanding the world but rather, following the logic of Area

characteristic of Latin American decolonial scholars such Anibal Quijano, whose formulation of a 'colonial matrix of power' identified the control of knowledge as one of four domains (including the economy) through which Europe coordinated its subjugation of the rest of the world.[44] In Mignolo's view, European thought only appears universal because of a deliberate dissimulation in which its geographical boundedness is effaced. Yet it is 'geo-historically located' just like any other system of thought in a world comprising 'different locations of understanding and of knowledge production.'[45] Instead of unfolding as a single linear chronology in the manner of Hegel, Mignolo sees history as occurring across 'heterogeneous historico-structural nodes' representing separate local perspectives.[46]

This is a compelling formulation, offering a more egalitarian alternative to the unilinear diffusionism of the core onto the periphery, and is in tune with some of the central concerns of the figures we are looking at. Decolonial thought is largely responsible for bringing in the concept of core-periphery into the knowledge exchange within the colonized world, a perspective which my thesis builds on.[47] Epistemic relativism denies the claim to universality of the core and opens the possibility for a polycentric, multipolar world freed from the undue prominence historically enjoyed by the West. However, an appeal to 'epistemic relativism' can easily devolve into a form of cultural determinism in which the limits of knowledge are set according to social norms, and where no individual thinker can transcend the bonds of the organic community. Any kind of universalism, or even translation across cultural knowledge systems, becomes impossible, a position justifiably

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Studies, as a body of knowledge which is valid within the geographical and cultural realm that gave rise to it: 'Martin Heidegger was actually doing European studies, as were Michel Foucault, Pierre Bourdieu and Jurgen Habermas. European experiences were their system of reference. Once we recognize how extremely limited the current conditions of knowledge are, we learn to be humble about knowledge claims. The universalist assertions of theory are premature, for theory too must be deimperialized.' *Asia as Method: Toward Deimperialization* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2010), p. 3. As quoted by Walter D. Mignolo, *The Darker Side of Modernity: Global Futures, Decolonial Options* (Durham, NC and London: Duke University Press, 2011), p. 60.

[44] Ibid, pp. 8-9.

[45] Ibid, pp. 13-14.

[46] Ibid, p. 49.

[47] Enrique Dussel's perspective here is useful because, while he characterizes modernity as the imposition of a world-system in which Europe is the centre, he explains how this centripetal movement did not produce uniformity but generated 'an asystematic, asymmetric, anarchic moment' at the margins of the system. Although he is writing about the world economy, a similar claim could be made about the disruptive power of peripheral intellectuals. Enrique Dussel, *Philosophy of Liberation*, trans. by Aquilina Martinez and Christine Morkovsky (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock, 1985), p. 145.

criticized: on empirical grounds, because liberation struggles have historically laid claim to the universal rights propounded in the colonial metropole but denied to the colonized[48]; and on logical grounds, because of the difficulty in maintaining that the claim to universalism is unique to Western thought. There are important non-Western philosophical systems that are systematic and universal in scope. Even at a more modest level, the claim to universality is difficult to separate from the act of making propositions about the world:

> Universalism is neither an ideology, nor a faith, nor an epistemology. It is intrinsic to beliefs, and it is thus present in every belief and in every rationality. As [Paul] Boghossian points out, essential to the possibility of beliefs is their propositional content. A belief, he argues, presupposes 'a *truth condition*—how the world would have to be if the belief is to be true.[49]

Although different communities may well possess very different systems for understanding the world, it is intrinsic to belief to think that what we believe is true 'and that our reasons for believing what we do are the right reasons; to say otherwise makes nonsense of any belief.' [50] If all belief systems are universalist then it becomes impossible to claim that abolishing the Eurocentric pretence of universalism would automatically allow multiple world views to coexist. Surmounting Western epistemic hegemony need not entail treating epistemic systems as geographically limited in scope, as the expression of cultural identity. This truncates the interest in different epistemologies beyond a narrow local applicability and misrecognizes the common human logical and conceptual structures which underlie thought and enable communication.

An alternative account of intellectual exchange between the core and the periphery is required if we are to do justice to figures such as Firmin and Marr. I propose two central points intended to acknowledge the hegemonic nature of Western thought, which did indeed marginalize our two thinkers, while recognizing that it also had the capacity to be critically reformulated.

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[48] Priyamvada Gopal, *Insurgent Empire: Anticolonial Resistance and British Dissent* (London and New York: Verso, 2019), pp. 25-26.
[49] Hatfield 2015, p. 48; quoting Paul Boghossian, *Fear of Knowledge: Against Relativism and Constructivism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006), p. 11.
[50] Hatfield 2015, p. 49.

Firstly, it is necessary to differentiate between 'discourse' and 'concept'. I intend 'discourse' to describe the configuration of knowledge as a system designed to master the world by producing a dense self-referential simulacrum of reality. It describes Western thought in its orientation towards control and towards maintaining a privileged interior and an objectified exterior. Discourses always imply an exercise of power, which is held by one place and exerted over another. Whereas discourse is monolithic, concepts are multiple and complex. Discourse always implies a particular geographical grounding reflecting a colonial power dynamic and corresponding to the stance of individual thinkers—whether they are inside or outside of the discourse. Concepts know no fixed point of origin. They can move from place to place and can be realized in many different ways.

Secondly, we do not need to reconstitute Firmin and Marr as forming part of a cohesive counter-discourse in order to appreciate the significance of their conceptual interventions. They provided important and novel reformulation of important concepts. To some degree they did inspire subsequent generations of scholars and, particularly in the case of Marr, gain the kind of professional and political prominence that allowed them to dictate the terms of discourse.[51] However, their political and intellectual successes were short-lived. Their written oeuvres, which form the subject of this thesis, have received extensive scholarly attention but were never incorporated into the mainstream. What interests me most about them is that they represent a path not taken by mobilizing concepts in a novel way. It may even be harmful to claim that they constituted a counter-discourse as this would imply an incommensurateness of discursive difference which could scarcely do justice to figures such as these who so persistently challenged the location of Western philosophy.

[51] For Marr's willingness to use the repressive powers of the state to further his intellectual career, see Dmitry Shlapentokh, 'The Fate of Nikolai Marr's Linguistic Theories: The Case of Linguistics in the Political Context', *Journal of Eurasian Studies* 2 (2011), 60-73 (p. 64).

Marginal Critiques

Firmin and Marr shared the unenviable position of writing from the margins of the nineteenth-century world. Early in their intellectual careers, they both came to the realization that their homelands were assigned a subordinate position within the prevailing Western ethnographic and historiographic paradigms. This compelled them to come up with paradigms of their own which re-evaluated Europe's place in the world and no longer assigned historical pre-eminence to a core in relation to a less important periphery.

Since achieving independence in 1804 following the most successful slave rebellion in history, Haiti faced many challenges in maintaining national integrity and defending its sovereignty against the continued interference of foreign powers. France had obliged Haiti to pay compensation for lost property, including slaves, which by the 1870s led to mounting national debt and caused French bankers to take over the running of the country's finances.[52] The waning of European influence in the Americas brought about the decline and fall of the Spanish Empire and saw an increasing assertiveness of the United States, which viewed Haiti as occupying an important strategic position within its expanding sphere of influence. Alongside economic and political ostracization, Haiti's revolutionary history and the bold challenge it presented to theories of black racial inferiority were frequently trivialized or ignored by European historians, becoming relegated to the status of 'non-event.'[53] Haiti did have its occasional French admirers, such as the abolitionist Victor Schœlcher. He condemned the mismanagement by the country's ruling elite but celebrated the political agency of the Haitian people and the historical significance of the revolution: 'les nègres conquérant leur liberté sur l'armée la plus vaillante et la plus intelligente du monde, ont invinciblement prouvé qu'ils pouvaient, bien conduits, rivaliser avec les blancs'.[54] The historian Jules Michelet praised Haiti's cultural refinement and spirit of liberty, even granting it the epithet

[52] Dubois 2012, p. 175.
[53] Michel-Rolph Trouillot, *Silencing the Past: Power and the Production of History* (Boston: Beacon Press, 2015), p. 98.
[54] Victor Schœlcher, *Colonies étrangères et Haïti*, 2 vols (Paris: Pagnerre, 1843), ii, p. 326; quoted by Dale Tomich, 'Thinking the 'Unthinkable': Victor Schœlcher and Haiti', *Review (Fernand Braudel Center)*, 31 (2008), 401-431 (p. 422).

'la France noire'.[55] However, this praise must be viewed within the context of Michelet's idiosyncratic theory of history, in which 'feminine' races (of which Haiti is a representative) are encouraged to form unions with 'masculine' civilizations such as France.[56] Michelet was hardly making a case for treating Haiti as an equal party on the international stage. For all his eccentricity, Michelet was an influential forerunner of the French colonial ideology of spreading civilization through imperial tutelage, a principle that Haiti's sovereignty defied, thereby rendering it incompatible with the dominant historiographical frame.[57]

The Caucasus was a region remade by Russian military strategy. Its incorporation into the Russian Empire began with the annexation of the Kingdom of Kartli-Kakheti in 1801, to which were added territories acquired from the Ottoman and Persian empires through conquests lasting well into the latter half of the century. The Caucasus was a culturally, linguistically, and topographically daunting region whose mastery was essential if Russia was to project its power in the world. A Russian historian of Marr's generation characterized it as a 'bridge laid down from Europe into Asia', marked by great economic and natural diversity and many 'complex cultural hybridizations [skreščivanij]'.[58] The mechanisms of exerting power varied greatly. The consolidation of Russian rule was a protracted process involving territorial reorganization, co-opting local nobility into the imperial administrative system, and pragmatic tolerance of Christian and Muslim religious institutions.[59] If the Russians ruled with a comparatively light touch in Marr's native province of Guria, where local nobility still played a prominent role economically, this was not the case in the mountainous North Caucasus, where the military conducted campaigns of extermination and deportation against the rebellious Avar, Chechen, Cherkess (or Circassian), and Abkhaz population in order to pacify the

[55] Jules Michelet, *La Femme* [1860] (Paris: Flammarion, 1981, p. 184; quoted in Claude Rétat, 'Jules Michelet, l'idéologie vu vivant', *Romantisme. Revue du dix-neuvième siècle*, 130 (2005), 9-22 (p. 21).
[56] Rétat 2005, pp. 20-22.
[57] Michelet viewed the expansive force of the French nation as its defining feature, connecting its primitive fusion of tribes to its later colonial expansion beyond its borders. Cf. Carole Reynaud-Paligot, 'Construction and Circulation of the Notion of 'Race' in the Nineteenth Century', in *The Invention of Race: Scientific and Popular Representations*, ed. by Nicolas Bancel, Thomas David, Dominic Thomas (New York: Routledge, 2014), pp. 87-99 (pp. 89-91).
[58] From a manuscript by the historian M. A. Polievktov (1872-1942), quoted by Š. V. Megrelidze, *Zakavkaz'e v russko-tjureckoj vojne 1877-1878 gg.* (Tbilisi: Mecniereba, 1972), p. 6.
[59] Andreas Kappeler, *Russland als Vielvörkerreich: Entstehung, Geschichte, Zerfall*, 2nd edn (Munich: Beck, 1993), pp. 141-149.

region.[60] Russian rule in the Caucasus brought the region's linguistic diversity to the attention of European scholars in a time when the discipline of comparative linguistics was perfecting its genealogical trees of world languages. Yet, although some of the languages in the Caucasus fit within existing paradigms as 'Turkic' or—notably in the case of Armenian—'Indo-European', many more, including Georgian, defied easy classification. The situation was not aided by the deficiencies of available published linguistic summaries, which were incomplete and full of errors.[61] The incomprehensibility of the region's languages and cultures bred scorn, as evidenced by an English geographer's blithe assessment that 'none of the Caucasian people except the Georgians possess any historic importance.'[62]

When entering into dialogue with representatives of Western scholarship, Firmin and Marr both experienced moments in which their personal identity and scholarly expertise were assigned a lowly position within the prevailing scale of values. Key biographical episodes revealed to both writers that they stood outside the centres of discursive authority.

Joining the Société d'anthropologie de Paris in 1884 was a crucial event in shaping Firmin's intellectual outlook and rhetorical stance as a writer. As conceived by its founder Paul Broca, the Société was devoted to the study of the human race in its totality, in a spirit of free enquiry unencumbered by religious dogma, often at odds with the Catholic Church, and emphasizing the need for careful observation before assigning causes to phenomena.[63] Instead of rationalism and scientific open-mindedness, Firmin was stunned that the members of the Société maintained a dogmatic belief in racial inequality which was not tempered by having admitted him and his fellow Haitian Louis-Joseph Janvier as members:[64]

[60] Kappeller 1993, pp. 149-155.
[61] Georgij A. Klimov, *Einführung in die kaukasische Sprachwissenschaft*, trans. by Jost Gippert (Hamburg: Buske, 1994), p. 32.
[62] A. H. Keane, *Asia*, 2 vols (London: Stanford, 1896), i, p. 372.
[63] Jean-Claude Wartelle, 'La Société d'anthropologie de Paris de 1859 à 1920', *Revue d'histoire des sciences humaines*, 10 (2004), 125-171 (pp. 128-129); Alice Conklin, *In the Museum of Man: Race, Anthropology, and Empire in France, 1850-1950* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2013), p. 25.
[64] Janvier was already a member of the Société d'anthropologie and put Firmin forward for election as a member; Price-Mars 1964, p. 148.

> Est-il naturel de voir siéger dans une même société et au même titre des hommes que la science même qu'on est censé représenter semble déclarer inégaux?[65]

Rather than intervening directly in the debates of the Société, Firmin chose to formulate his critique of the prevailing doctrines of racial inequality, along with his rehabilitation of black African history and his vindication of Haitian civilization, in a 650-page monograph. Astonishingly, the work he is most known for, *De l'égalité des races humaines*, emerged one year after Firmin first joined the Société. The book is both a scientific treatise and a tactical display of eloquence in which Firmin's skill as a writer in and of itself is intended to disprove the thesis of black inferiority. This aspect of the text is announced in the preface, where Firmin humbly apologises for his book's shortcomings before confidently asserting his right to be taken seriously as a practitioner of scientific discourse:

> Ce n'est pas que je croie avoir excellé dans la tâche que je me suis imposée; mais à des hommes instruits et intelligents il suffit d'indiquer un ordre d'idées, pour que la vérité qui en découle brille à leurs yeux avec une éloquente évidence:
>
> *Verum animo satis hæc vestigia parva sagaci Sunt.*[66]
>
> Je suis noir. D'autre part, j'ai toujours considéré le culte de la science comme le seul vrai, le seul digne de la constante attention et de l'infini dévouement de tout homme qui ne se laisse guider que par la libre raison. Comment pourrais-je concilier les conclusions que l'on semble tirer de cette même science contre les aptitudes des Noirs avec cette vénération passionnée et profonde qui est pour moi un besoin impérieux de l'esprit? (xii)[67]

Firmin displays confidence in his use of rhetoric, including the adept deployment of classical quotation to the performance of modesty as a means of winning the reader's goodwill. Yet for all his manifest skill as a writer in the classical tradition, this

[65] Firmin 1885, p. ix.
[66] 'But for a keen-scented mind, these little tracks are enough'. Lucretius, *On the Nature of Things*, trans. by W. H. D. Rouse (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2014), p. 35.
[67] For an analysis of this passage, see also Paul B. Miller, ''Tous les hommes sont l'homme': Anténor Firmin, Toussaint Louverture, Racial Equality, and the Fact of Blackness', in *Reconstructing the Social Sciences and Humanities*, ed. by Joseph and Mocombe (2021), pp. 29-45 (p. 37).

passage precariously negotiates several conflicting positions in a manner which is characteristic of the book as a whole: the claim that truth is truth irrespective of who utters it, which contrasts with Firmin's foregrounding of his individuality as an author; the assertion of racial identity in the same breath as denying that it has any bearing on how a person should be judged; the ostensible plainness of scientific truth versus the need to package it in literary artifice. This is a delicate balancing act. Sadly, Firmin's scientific intervention did not achieve its goal of rehabilitating the black race in the eyes of Europeans. In 1892 Firmin found himself once again within the halls of the Société d'anthropologie, only to be confronted with a query from one its members asking him if his intellectual prowess could be attributed to his perhaps having white ancestors.[68]

Marr's lifelong antipathy towards Western European linguistics was likely forged in an early encounter with leading scholars in the field. At the suggestion of his mentor Viktor Rozen, Marr spent the summer of 1894 at the (then-German) University of Strasburg.[69] The university was home to famous scholars such as Theodor Nöldeke, whose courses on Aramaic Marr attended.[70] Its department of philology also included Heinrich Hübschmann, a scholar who had achieved fame in the field of comparative Indo-European linguistics for his solution to the problem of how to classify the Armenian language. By isolating the language's genuine phonetic principles from beneath accreted layers of loanwords, thereby revealing its true place within the evolution of Indo-European sound laws, Hübschmann determined that Armenian did not belong to the Iranian languages but constituted a separate branch of the Indo-European family.[71] Marr by this point had his own ideas about the genetic classification of Armenian. A later anecdote recalls that, while still struggling to get to grips with Armenian, which he was being taught formally by monks, Marr found he could understand the speech of Armenian peasants with relative ease. Their dialect seemed remarkably similar to Georgian, which led Marr

[68] Robert Bernasconi, 'A Haitian in Paris: Anténor Firmin as a Philosopher against Racism', *Patterns of Prejudice*, 44 (2008), 365-383 (p. 383); Miller 2021, p. 43.
[69] Lawrence Thomas, *The Linguistic Theories of N. Ja. Marr* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1957), pp. 3-4.
[70] Nikolaj Marr, 'Osnovnye dostiženija jafetičeskoj teorii' [1925]a, in *Izbrannye raboty*, ed. by V. B. Aptekar' and A. G. Ioannisjan (Leningrad: Gosudarstvennaja akademija istorii material'noj kul'tury, 1933-1936), 5 vols, I (1933), pp. 197-216 (p. 205).
[71] Rüdiger Schmitt, 'Von Bopp bis Hübschmann: Das Armenische als indogermanische Sprache', *Zeitschrift für vergleichende Sprachforschung*, 89 (1975), 3-30 (pp. 25-27).

to intuit a primordial connection between the two languages that later Indo-European influence over Armenian had managed to obscure. This anecdote is possibly apocryphal;[72] nonetheless, by 1899 Marr was confident enough in his beliefs to assert that Armenian contained 'a basic layer connecting it with the neighbouring Georgian language and influencing […] the transformation of the undoubtedly strong Aryan layer in it'.[73] This was the germ of his later Japhetic theory. In Strasburg Marr attempted to engage Hübschmann in a discussion of the non-Indo-European elements of Armenian but was harshly rebuffed.[74] Marr's response was to assert his independence from Western European linguistic scholarship: for the rest of his career, he would claim to possess a scholarly model uniquely suited to the languages of the Caucasus which was born out of his deep affinity with the linguistic material in question.[75] Less than a decade after meeting Hübschmann, Marr prefaced his study of Armenian grammar with an attack on the 'theoretical abstraction' of comparative linguistics which failed to grasp language in its 'local setting'.[76]

Whereas Firmin still held out hope for communication with European scholarship, Marr belligerently attacked mainstream comparative linguists, reproaching them for their lack of linguistic expertise and their unwillingness to adopt his own theories. Most of his contemporaries with overlapping scholarly interests in Germany, France, and Austria found his manner to be odious.[77] Marr saw the comparative method of linguistics as a colonial endeavour in which Western European scholars, lacking direct knowledge of the countries they studied, annexed

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[72] Alpatov, who records the anecdote, attributes it to Marr's untrustworthy propagandist Valerian Aptekar'. V. M. Alpatov, *Istorija odnogo mifa: Marr i marrizm*, 2nd edn (Moscow: URSS, 2004), p. 17.

[73] Nikolaj Marr, 'K voprosu o zadačakh armenovedenii' [1899], *Izbrannye raboty*, I (1933), pp. 16-22 (p. 19); as quoted and translated in Thomas 1957, p. 21.

[74] Thomas 1957, p. 4.

[75] As one historian recently put it, 'the details of their argument are not known, but it is tempting to see in this confrontation between a German scholar and an unknown native from the fringes of the Russian Empire a clash between a hegemonic German learning and a subaltern non-Western knowledge.'; Michiel Leezenberg, 'Soviet Orientalism and Subaltern Linguistics: the Rise and Fall of Marr's Japhetic Theory', in *The Making of the Humanities*, ed. by Rens Bod, Jaap Maat, and Thijs Weststeijn (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2010-2014), 3 vols, III (2014), pp. 97-112 (p. 102).

[76] Nikolaj Marr, *Grammatika drevnearmjanskogo jazyka. Ėtimologija* (St. Petersburg: Fakultet vostočnykh jazykov Imperatorskogo S.-Peterburgskogo Universiteta, 1903), pp. xxx, xxxii.

[77] See for instance the comments of the famous German Caucasologist Adolf Dirr: 'man hat den Eindruck, dass Marr zuviel beweisen will, und dieser Eindruck wird noch erhöht durch die Weite seiner Lautgesetze und durch die oft recht unangenehme Art, mit der er von Forschern spricht, die das nicht gesehen haben, was er sehen will.' Adolf Dirr, 'Rezension', *Caucasica*, 1 (1924), 108-109 (p. 109).

languages into their taxonomic schemes. Later in his career he derisively referred to Western scholars who drew on evidence from Caucasian languages to fill in gaps in the linguistic patchwork of prehistoric Europe as 'Argonauts' setting sail for Colchis in search of the Golden Fleece.[78] Yet despite differences in tone and rhetorical strategy, Marr and Firmin shared a desire to disrupt the monopoly of scholarly expertise held by Europe. They believed a universal framework of knowledge could be developed that would encompass the disparate historical destinies of the world's peoples. However, scholarly expertise could not be monopolized only by those countries that modernity had smiled upon. Firmin laid the groundwork for a democratized global account of history in *De l'Égalité,* which amounted to a thoroughgoing remaking of the framework of racial origins and cultural diffusion. Marr's concerns were initially confined to the daunting task of redefining the internal genetic relationships between Caucasus languages. However, he became global in his outlook, initially by expanding his research to the pre-Indo-European linguistic map of Europe and subsequently by advancing a theory of linguistic evolution applicable to all languages of the world.

For both our thinkers, a universal scholarly paradigm could only be created by wresting the initiative away from Western European scholars who had proved not to be the most capable wielders of the implements at their disposal. In the eyes of Firmin and Marr, Europe had proved its parochialism by retaining a hierarchical mode of thought which placed Europe at the summit of civilization despite intervening scientific progress which had rendered such a view obsolete. Firmin's *De l'Égalité des races humaines* analyses the lapses in European scholarship on race and the persistence of unfounded prejudices. Evolutionary biology, which had reached a recent apogee with the publication in 1871 of Charles Darwin's *The Descent of Man*, had definitively proven the unity of the human race, contrary to the polygenetic theory that races constitute separate species, thereby discrediting the belief in innate racial superiority or inferiority. Yet these scientific advances had merely allowed old prejudices to emerge under new guises.[79] Firmin's magnum opus is primarily a

[78] Nikolaj Marr, 'Jafetičeskij Kavkaz i tretij ėtničeskij ėlement v sozidanii Sredizemnomorskoj kul'tury' [1920], *Izbrannye raboty*, I (1933), pp. 79-124 (p. 106).
[79] In this regard Firmin registered what Robert Young has observed about the influence of Darwin: 'The effect of Darwin's work with respect to race was by no means as decisive as in other areas of natural science. Darwinism displaced some racial ideologies, but replaced them with others. Initially,

rebuke of Arthur de Gobineau's multi-volume *Essai sur l'inégalité des races humaines* (1852-1855). Gobineau's pessimistic account of racial degeneration, in which the superior Aryan civilization ultimately succumbs to miscegenation with lesser races, was based not in science but in cultural analysis. Its message of white supremacy should not have stood up to Darwin. And yet, as Firmin discovered in Paris, Darwin's interpreters and proselytes were all too eager to turn the theory of natural selection into a vindication of white racial superiority in the struggle for existence. As for Marr, the science of linguistics had begun at the turn of the nineteenth century with the discovery by William Jones of grammatical parallels between Sanskrit and Ancient Greek, an insight built upon by Franz Bopp and others in what became the Indo-European family. This event had shifted the geographical horizon of European linguistic history away from Greece and into India. Yet it had not unseated a European sense of being at the centre of world history. Instead, Indo-European linguistics, which as a discipline always invoked questions of race and culture, led Western Europeans to think of themselves as the descendants of a culture which had triumphantly forged a path through Europe and Asia, vanquishing everything in its path. The formal linguistic traits that defined the Indo-European family, such as inflectional morphology, were seen as innately superior to those found in other unrelated languages.[80] Unlike Firmin, Marr did not produce a single definitive refutation of the scholarly Eurocentrism which faced him. Instead, he elaborated a critique over many years which is scattered across numerous short articles.

This critique of Europe's preoccupation with its origins and genealogy links Firmin and Marr to more recent philosophical attempts at encompassing the global in a manner that does justice to the local. The Martinican poet and philosopher Édouard Glissant contrasted what he termed 'atavistic' and 'composite' cultures. The Caribbean for Glissant describes a space of open-ended, mobile, non-hierarchical cultures which are unencumbered with the desire to establish their value through

in fact, his arguments were often considered to favour a version of the polygenist argument'. Young 1995, p. 13.

[80] Friedrich von Schlegel could not see the comparative method, which worked well for 'organic' inflecting languages Semitic and Indo-European, being extended with success to the remaining, non-inflecting 'inorganic' languages of the world in which 'die Wurzel selbst eigentlich unverändert und unfruchtbar bleibt'. Hans Arens, *Sprachwissenschaft: der Gang ihrer Entwicklung von der Antike bis zur Gegenwart*, 2nd edn (Freiburg and Munich: Alber, 1969), p. 163; quoting from Schlegel, 'Über die Sprache und Weisheit der Indier' (1808).

their lineage. European cultures by contrast are atavistic because they derive their national origin and territorial legitimacy from a divine act of creation; 'la filiation et la légitimité sont les deux mamelles de cette sorte de Droit divin de propriété.'[81] Both Firmin and Marr engaged in a strikingly similar provocation of Europe's claim of being more advanced on the scale of civilization. In Firmin's assessment, European scholars

> ne font dans leur conscience imparfaitement éclairée, que s'opiniâtrer à des idées vieilles et vermoulues. De ces idées on a renversé tous les tenants et aboutissants; mais une certaine impulsion atavique porte tous ces savants à les défendre encore, sans qu'ils en devinent l'influence. (620)

In very similar terms, Marr foregrounded a kernel of civilized irrationality as the chief impediment to the introduction of a global theory of language in place of the nationally and racially delimited accounts of origins:

> Public opinion not merely in Russia, but in the contemporary world as a whole, and the atavistic conceptions [atavističeskie predstavlenija] linked to it, forestalls any real interest in the possibility of discerning the relatedness, the genetic relatedness of coloured people [černokožikh] to our psyche, to our language.[82]

A persistent preoccupation of anti-colonial thought links our two thinkers with more recent writers such as Glissant: the substitution of a vertical scheme for cultural relations, in which Europe occupies a position at the top commensurate to its perceived racial superiority, with a non-hierarchical global scheme in which cultures relate along lateral axes and do not revolve exclusively around a single core.

Having dislodged Europe from its preeminent position, Firmin and Marr set out to construct their own evolutionary models which ambitiously claimed to apply to all cultures and languages without invoking racial determinism. Their theories were similar in several important ways. They both present evolution as being driven by laws which apply universally. This is true of Firmin's thesis of the universal capacity for societies, irrespective of race, to advance forward to civilization:

[81] Édouard Glissant, *Traité du Tout-Monde* (Paris: Gallimard, 1997), p. 35.
[82] Marr [1920], p. 89.

> Les mêmes lois en faveur desquelles les peuples civilisés ont marché vers la lumière et la perfection, sont celles qui conduiront les peuples attardés dans la route de la civilisation à la réalisation de leurs rêves de gloire et d'agrandissement. (524)

Thus, Firmin redefines civilization as a developmental state which all societies have the potential to reach, and not the achievement of a select few.[83] After the refutation of prejudice, Firmin's other main concern in *De l'Égalité* is gathering historical evidence which proves that all societies obey the same fundamental laws of development; his foremost example is Haiti since the Revolution. Likewise, Marr saw all linguistic development as subject to the same stadial evolutionary process. Below the surface level of variability and ostensible inherited genetic difference between languages, Marr identified a series of regular correspondences: the meanings of words evolved in accordance with the 'strict demands of Japhetic semantics'[84] and phonetic similarities between languages were explicable as 'law-bound [zakonomernye] sound correspondences'.[85] Marr eventually made these linguistic laws the basis of his 'global glottogonic theory' of language evolution, a process which comprised a 'necessary' sequence of stages.[86] This theory presented all languages, irrespective of their genetic affiliations, as universally subject to development according to laws which were not genetic but immanent in the global process. Both thinkers had to reconcile difference within their totalizing schemes. Stated simply, they achieved this by arguing that separate cultures realize the universal laws independently of one another. They provide the impetus for growth individually, but the growth follows a regular pattern.

For both thinkers, the solution to being marginalized by Western scholarship was to formulate new universalist paradigms which were not characterized by the relation of core to periphery. Despite the differences of tone with which they addressed European scholarship, they each intervened into the dominant discourse in similar ways: they embraced the idea of developmental laws which had been a major

[83] Cf. Bernasconi, who identifies the central thesis of *De l'Égalité des races humaines* as the argument that all races share an 'equal potential' for achieving civilization. Bernasconi 2008, p. 380.
[84] Nikolaj Marr, 'Quelques termes d'architecture, désignant "voûte' ou "arc"', *Jafetičeskij Sbornik* 2 (1923b), 137-167 (p. 150).
[85] Nikolaj Marr, 'O proiskhoždenii jazyka' [1926]c, *Izbrannye raboty*, II (1936), pp. 179-209 (p. 191).
[86] See Sériot 2014, pp. 117.

preoccupation of European scholars but expanded the remit of these laws to a decentred model of the world. Their aim was to drain universalism of its Eurocentrism and apply it to the world in such a way that local particularism is not subsumed but is allowed to stand on its own.

## Chapter Plan

This thesis will examine how Firmin and Marr constructed their alternative scholarly paradigms, which discourses they intervened in, and what trade-offs they had to reckon with when making their conceptual interventions, before assessing the results of these theoretical insights when applied to real-world scenarios they encountered during the lifetimes. The thesis contains three chapters which are grouped into two pairs.

Chapter 1 will trace the development of Firmin and Marr's historiographical paradigms comparatively with one another. Which versions of Western universalism did they endorse, how complete a rupture did they represent with the mainstream? Firmin and Marr both shared a grounding in positivist evolutionary thought: we can see this in Firmin's sustained reading of Auguste Comte, which he foregrounds in *De l'Égalité*, and in Marr's indebtedness to Herbert Spencer, an influence that ran throughout his work despite his later profession of having adopted a Marxist framework.[87] Both thinkers encountered a similar form of 'genealogical prejudice' despite being engaged in different debates. A concept which will prove valuable to our investigation is what Mudimbe refers to as the 'relative epistemological unity of social sciences since the nineteenth century', which is to say that apparently distinct scholarly disciplines, treating objects seemingly remote from one another, can be related to one another by their shared methods and premises.[88] By paying careful attention to the details of the debates into which they intervened, the broader underlying issues come to the fore, as well as the parallels between their responses.

[87] Craig Brandist, *The Dimensions of Hegemony: Language, Culture and Politics in Revolutionary Russia* (Leiden and Boston: Brill, 2015), pp. 213-214.
[88] Mudimbe 1988, p. 18.

This granular approach to discourse and conceptual intervention will challenge the extremes of hagiography and condemnation which have characterised both thinkers' reception in past decades.

The editor of Firmin's first English translation established an interpretative framework for Firmin which many, though not all, commentators have adhered to: she presented Firmin as having been deliberately neglected because his ideas were too radical, and that *De l'Égalité* presents views that are consistent with the modern conception of anthropology, predating by decades developments in European thought, such as the work of Emil Durkheim and Marcel Mauss.[89] Firmin's text has been praised for reading 'like a contemporary treatise', establishing Firmin as a 'precursor of many great 20th century thinkers'[90]. Such highly favourable assessments are understandable given Firmin's marginalization; however, hyperbole brings about its own obscurity. Firmin's indebtedness to Paul Broca, a theme which I will pursue in Chapter 1, is generally overlooked because Broca is seen simply as an adversary. Yet Firmin made pragmatic use of many concepts which have had complicated and murky afterlives. Indeed, the English translator of *De l'Égalité* has drawn attention to the hitherto unexamined influence of Fichte and Rudolf Kjellén, inventor of concept of Lebensraum, on Firmin.[91] Firmin's influence on his immediate contemporaries is less well documented, although Cuban scholars have long acknowledged the high regard in which he was held by José Martí.[92] The 2013 publication of a Spanish-language translation of *De l'Égalité* in Cuba forms part of an ongoing and nuanced assessment of nineteenth-century Pan-Caribbean thought of which Firmin was a part.[93]

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[89] Carolyn Fluehr-Lobban, 'Introduction', in Anténor Firmin, *The Equality of the Human Races*, 2nd edn, trans. by Asselin Charles (Champaign, IL: University of Illinois Press, 2002), pp. xi-xlvi (pp. xv-xvi).
[90] Watson R. Denis, 'Review of *The Equality of human races. (Positivist anthropology)* by Anténor Firmin, Asselin Charles', *Caribbean Studies*, 34 (2006), 325-334 (pp. 325, 333).
[91] Asselin Charles, 'Race and Geopolitics in the Work of Anténor Firmin', *The Journal of Pan African Studies* 7 (2014), 68-88 (pp.72-5).
[92] Jean Maxius Bernard, 'Honor eterno al Haitiano Extraordinario', (preface to) Anténor Firmin *Igualdad de las razas humanas. Antropología positiva*, trans. Aurora Fibla Madrigal, ed. Norma Suárez Suárez (Havana: Editorial de Ciencias Sociales, 2013), pp. v-ix (p. viii).
[93] Cf. Yolanda Martínez-San Miguel and Katerina Gonzales Seligmann, 'Con-Federating the Archipelago: Introduction', *Small Axe*, 61 (2020), 37-43; Kahlil Chaar-Pérez, '"A Revolution of Love": Ramón Emeterio Betances, Anténor Firmin, and Affective Communities in the Caribbean', *The Global South*, 7.2 (2013), 11-36; Ileana Sanz, 'Early Groundings for a Circum-Caribbean Integrationist Thought', *Caribbean Quarterly* 55.1 (2009), 1-14.

Marr has been subject to even more extreme assessments. One comment in particular has achieved canonical status: Nikolai Trubektzkoy's quip, expressed in a letter of 1924 to his close collaborator and fellow Prague School linguist Roman Jakobson, that the ideal person to review Marr's writings ought to be 'less a linguist than a psychiatrist'[94]. Whereas Marr was at one point allowed to exert nearly hegemonic influence over Soviet linguistics, post-war assessments on both sides of the Cold War ideological divide have tended to be damning. The linguistic debate initiated by Stalin led to the publication in 1951 of a two-volume collection of articles attacking Marr entitled *Against the Vulgarization and Corruption of Marxism in Linguistics*. Six years later the author of the first and thus far only English-language monograph devoted to Marr—still an invaluable reference work—delivers a succinct assessment:

> Marr undoubtedly had a factual knowledge of Caucasian languages which would have enabled him to carry far forward the work begun by Güldenstädt, Uslar, and Dirr. Instead, he chose to follow a will-o'-the-wisp.[95]

More recently, however, critical approaches have emerged which seek to do justice to Marr on his own terms. In a work originally published in 2005, the historian of Russian and Soviet linguistics Patrick Sériot proposed reading Marr alongside 'Vico, Condillac or the Abbé Boudet to try to reconstruct Marr's known, obscured or completely unknown sources, his phobias, fantasies and "turn of mind", without making any *a priori* judgments.'[96] I endorse this approach because it avoids the trap of judging Marr by standards of modern-day linguistic paradigms and allows room for his conceptual perspicacity.[97]

Chapters 2 and 3 shift to looking at Firmin and Marr's thought in a more applied manner. Chapter 2 focuses on Firmin, Chapter 3 on Marr; each chapter seeks

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[94] N. S. Trubetzkoy and Roman Jakobson, *N.S. Trubetzkoy's Letters and Notes* (The Hague and Paris: Mouton, 1975), p. 74.
[95] Thomas 1957, p. 146.
[96] Patrick Sériot, 'If Vico had read Engels he would be called Nikolai Marr', trans. by Matthew Carson Allen, *Interventions: International Journal of Postcolonial Studies* , forthcoming, published online (2020) < https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/1369801X.2020.1784031 > [Accessed 29 December 2021], 1-27 (pp. 4-5).
[97] Ekaterina Velmezova puts this succinctly: 'on ne peut donner une interprétation épistémologique du marrisme qu'en sortant des limites de la linguistique proprement dite ou, en tout cas, de la linguistique étudiant "la langue pour elle-même et en elle-même"'. *Les lois du sens: la sémantique marriste* (Bern: Peter Lang, 2007), p. 340.

to embed its respective thinker in the density of their contemporary discursive debates. These chapters show how they too had to address the same problems which arise in any universalist scheme: namely, that to claim the existence of universally applicable laws of historical development risks denying the historical agency of individual and collective actors. This propensity to abstraction might hamper the effort of putting marginalized communities on the map of global history. In this regard nationalist discourse, with its foregrounding of community as an organic entity, is potentially better able to mobilise for minority rights. Many contemporaries of Firmin and Marr, in the Spanish Americas and the Caucasus, were nationalists. Our two thinkers had to develop alternatives to nationalism which did justice to local particularism. These chapters discuss how our two thinkers articulated collective identity without treating it as the expression of a timeless essence such as national Spirit.

Chapter 2 examines Firmin's late work, the *Lettres de Saint-Thomas* (1910), written while he was in exile. In it Firmin recounts his affiliation with expatriate groups of Latin American writers who were engaged in the struggles of national liberation of Cuba and Puerto Rico. These writers are significant because they theorized Pan-Caribbean regional solidarity. Their work attempted to reconfigure the region away from the colonial metropole and towards a form of fraternal, lateral solidarity. Firmin's text has been read as an unqualified endorsement of this position.[98] However, when we read between the lines of his text, we see his discomfort with a political ideology that proclaimed itself to be post-racial but in practical terms opposed independent black political agency and sought to ground culture in ethnic identity. Firmin's *Lettres* offer a provocative attempt to reconfigure culture not as arising out of immanent ethnic identity but as the product of pragmatic choice.

Chapter 3 examines Marr's treatment of collective identity in art history. Like many of his contemporaries, Marr was concerned with recuperating the traces of obscured artistic traditions preserved in material culture artefacts. He attempted to present artworks, contrary to the Renaissance humanist veneration of individual artistic genius, as the product of collective activity. The chapter traces Marr's ideas

[98] J. Michael Dash, 'Nineteenth-Century Haiti and the Archipelago of the Americas: Anténor Firmin's Letters from St. Thomas', *Research in African Literatures*, 35.2 (2004), 44-53 (p. 49).

in the context of Western European scholarly circles, including a disparate array of German and Austrian archaeologists and art historians such as the scholar of early Christian art, Josef Strzygowski. Marr's international scholarly associations, reflected in his numerous French and German-language publications, ranged from established academic circles to a shadowy para-academic demi-monde that was a source of both anti-colonial critique and ethno-nationalist rumination. Unlike many of the denizens of this world, Marr was committed to not adducing a unified ethnic essence as the cause of stylistic phenomena. What emerges instead is an account of style as an evolving formal system which is not based in an imagined continuity of ethnic identity.

## Chapter 1. Firmin, Marr, and the Laws of Multilinear Evolution

### 1.1 Introduction

Anténor Firmin and Nikolai Marr were both engaged in an intellectual project that could be characterised as seeking an 'expansion of the *dramatis personae* of history'.[1] Each sought to bring marginalized races, nations, languages, and cultures onto the world stage as legitimate participants in the unfolding of historical development. Firmin sought to redeem a race 'qui a souffert mille martyres, qui a été huée, conspuée, méprisée par les uns; brutalisée, systématiquement exterminée par les autres' (ERH, 655-6). Marr challenged the obscurity to which many of the world's indigenous languages and cultures had been consigned. 'Mal compris et par conséquent mal traités,' as he put it in the colourful preface to one of several French-language publications, 'ces pauvres peuples […] ont subi le sort du Lion de la fable qui devait se résigner à rester à jamais inférieur à la gloire de l'Homme parce qu'il n'avait pas de chantres à lui pour célébrer ses prouesses.'[2] Both viewed history as progressing inexorably towards a future stage of harmonious reconciliation in which present-day inequities are abolished. Yet they were also aware that a universalist view of history was compatible with the belief that certain racial and cultural varieties would win out over the rest; that the future would be dictated by the winners of the struggle for existence. This chapter examines how Firmin and Marr balanced their commitments to universalism with the enfranchisement of the marginalized. Although they drew inspiration from European thinkers, they had to use these sources carefully to overcome their in-built prejudices.

Ranked taxonomies of human difference were extremely prevalent in the overlapping fields of anthropology and linguistics in which Firmin and Marr wrote. Diagnosing the cultural myths and scientific discourses underpinning supposed inequalities was the focus of their critical projects. Arthur de Gobineau, author of the *Essai sur l'inégalité des races humaines* and the most immediate target of Firmin's

[1] Bernasconi 2008, p. 382.
[2] Nicholas [Nikolaj] Marr, *La Seine, la Sâone, Lutèce et les premiers habitants de la Gaule étrusques et pélasges* (Petrograd : Institut Japhétique de l'Académie des sciences de Russie, 1922c), p. 11.

work, produced a striking but by no means atypical division of humanity into 'white', 'yellow', and 'black' racial types.[3] Firmin's own *Essai* countered Gobineau's thesis of inherent racial inequality and the inevitable collapse, through miscegenation, of Western civilization, with an alternative thesis stressing racial equality and the universal human capacity for progress and improvement.[4] Gobineau was not necessarily the most important figure in Firmin's genealogy of racial hierarchization. An important pioneer of racial typology was the anatomist Johann Friedrich Blumenbach whom Firmin blamed for reducing anthropology to the study of physical characteristics to the exclusion of man's 'spiritual' properties (ERH, 7-8).[5] This narrowing of focus down to physiological difference meant that man, 'ce dernier venu de la création', came to be treated in the same manner as 'les minéraux, les végétaux et les animaux inférieurs à l'homme', thereby denying the role of non-biological factors, such as the formation of society, in the development of human nature (ERH, 9). Firmin traced Blumenbach's continued influence through the seemingly endless rearticulation of his classification of physical traits, out of which new categories constantly emerged. These included the duality of 'brachycephalic' (superior, 'short' skulled) and 'dolichocephalic' (inferior, 'long' skulled) types, each in turn giving rise to finely graded sub-categories (ERH, 134).[6] These physiological typologies were not limited to pessimists such as Gobineau who viewed the future in terms of the eventual destruction of civilization. As Firmin discovered through his participation in the Société d'Anthropologie, many writers viewed the competition between unequally endowed human varieties as the driving force of future development; they were optimistic about humanity's future, but instead of a harmonious reconciliation they forecast the eventual 'disparition des autres races humaines devant la race blanche' (ERH, 648).

Language lent itself to ranked typological classification just as much as race. Firmin saw the study of historical linguistics by European scholars as another

[3] Joseph Arthur comte de Gobineau, 'Essai sur l'inégalité des races humaines' [1853-5], in *Œuvres*, ed. by Jean Gaulmier, 3 vols (Paris : Gallimard, 1983-7), i (1983), pp. 133-1166 (p. 275); Young 1995, pp. 103-4.
[4] For Gobineau's miscegenation thesis, see Young 1995, pp. 101-3.
[5] Cf. Michael Banton, *Racial Theories* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987), pp. 5-6.
[6] For the origin of these categories of skull shape, see William Stanton, *The Leopard's Spots: Scientific Attitudes toward Race in America, 1815-59* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1960), p. 25.

manifestation of chauvinism—a view he shared with Marr. With a rhetorical flourish, Firmin characterized the Indo-European comparative method as:

> un lit de Procruste, où il fallait coûte que coûte faire entrer les nations et les langues: on coupait la tête à celles-ci ou une préfixe à celles-là; on y ajoutait de faux pieds ou des suffixes. Tout cela était estropié en diable, allait clopinant, mais semblait souverainement glorieux (ERH, 378-9).

Indeed, the chopping and changing of suffixes and prefixes mattered because morphology provided a persuasive way to classify languages and language families. Linguists commonly identified three types of morphology—*isolating*, in which there are no grammatical connections between words, *agglutinative*, in which grammatical connections occur by adding prefixes and suffixes to meaningful roots, and *inflectional*, in which meaningful and relational elements are fused—according to which different language families could be grouped.[7] The inflectional nature of the Indo-European languages could account for their success, explaining the greater imaginative freedom Indo-European speakers had in coining new concepts.[8] Because 'higher' (i.e. inflectional) morphological types were said to be evolutionarily superior to 'lower' types, entire families of languages could be ranked by beauty and sophistication, which were seen as reflecting intrinsic typological traits. [9] This taxonomic scheme worked to the detriment of Georgian and other languages of the Caucasus, which occupied an inferior rank due to their agglutinative morphology and their complex phonology.[10] The prevailing order of linguistic merit encouraged the characterization of the Caucasus as a repository of evolutionary failures; in Marr's words, as an assemblage of 'multifarious ethnic fragments haphazardly scattered about the territory by various peoples passing through the Caucasus on their migratory wanderings.' [11] Scholarly opinion differed significantly over the question

[7] The isolating, agglutinating, and inflectional triumvirate goes back to Schleicher and was popularized by Max Müller. Anna Morpurgo Davies, *History of Linguistics. Volume IV: Nineteenth-Century linguistics*, ed. by Giulio Lepschy (London and New York: Longman, 1994), pp. 213-4.
[8] Maurice Olender, *Les Langues du Paradis* (Paris: Seuil, 1989), p. 162.
[9] Joseph Greenberg, *Language Typology: A Historical and Analytic Overview* (The Hague and Paris: Mouton, 1974), pp. 38-9.
[10] The following remark made by a contemporary author read by Marr can be viewed as typical: 'Although speaking one of the harshest languages in Caucasia, where a surprisingly harsh phonetic system is the rule, the Georgian race is distinguished by a passionate love of song and music.' Keane 1896, i, p. 68.
[11] Marr [1920], p. 102. Marr appears to paraphrase the previously cited work by Keane: 'The popular view is, that we have in the Caucasus the remnants or fragments of the peoples who have from time to time been driven into these recesses from the surrounding lands, or who have passed through these

of how consistently linguistic and racial types coincided.[12] Nonetheless, the belief that the two correlated was sufficiently widespread for Firmin to assess linguistic classifications as a sub-section of *De l'Égalité*: 'cette division (of languages by morphological type) ne semble-t-elle pas répondre à celle de l'espèce humaine en trois grandes races, la jaune, la noire et la blanche?' (ERH, 176). Marr shared Firmin's scepticism of such an inviting conclusion; he would repeatedly deny the applicability of 'racial descent' to linguistic classification.[13]

In place of this ranking of fixed and immutable difference, Firmin proposed studying human societies according to their degree of 'civilization', a developmental trait which he viewed as racially neutral and universally attainable. Contrary to the Social Darwinist positions which had come to dominate anthropological discourse in France, Firmin argued that the development of 'aptitudes supérieures de civilisation' was dependent not on race but on favourable environmental conditions.[14] Whenever a people enjoyed these circumstances, they were bound to evolve 'spontanément vers un état de choses de plus en plus élevé' (ERH, 405). Recovering instances of black civilization historically (in Egypt) and in present-day Haiti was central to Firmin's refutation of Gobineau, who treated civilization not as a universal state of development but as a closed, culturally and racially delimited entity.[15] Firmin's chronology of black historical destiny was bookended by the glories of Egyptian civilization and, at the other end of the timeline, his native land and its providential mission: 'Haïti doit servir à la rehabilitation de l'Afrique' (ERH, xiii). Firmin devoted sizeable passages of his work to the beneficial influence Haiti was already exercising on its Afrodescendant population through its political emancipation and favourable climatic conditions.[16] Firmin conceived of civilization as a process governed by universal laws and not the fixed achievement of one individual race. It

highlands during the ceaseless flow of prehistoric and subsequent migration from Asia to Europe.' Keane 1896, i, pp. 370-1.

[12] See Thomas R. Trautmann, *Aryans and British India* (Berkely, Los Angeles, London: 1997), pp. 190-7.

[13] Marr 1926a, p. iv.

[14] For the emergence of the term 'darwinisme social' in France, see Linda L. Clark, *Social Darwinism in France* (Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 1984), pp. 5-8.

[15] Robert Edward Dreher, 'Arthur de Gobineau: An Intellectual Portrait' (unpublished doctoral thesis: University of Wisconsin, 1970), p. 64. Gobineau's thought can be read as a move away from an eighteenth-century conception of development whereby 'civilization was fundamentally a comparative concept that took on its meaning as the end-point in an historical view of the advancement of humanity.' Young 1995, p. 32.

[16] Cf. especially the section 'De la beauté dans les races humaines', Firmin 1885, pp. 270-301.

signalled a goal to which all nations and races evolved in parallel to one another, each individually tracing 'l'ascension merveilleuse qui a conduit les peoples civilisés à leur degré de perfectionnement actuel', converging upon a utopian future in which 'les races, se reconnaissant égales, pourront se respecter et s'aimer' (ERH, 424, 659).

Marr's strategies for challenging prevailing linguistic taxonomies took various forms. Initially he set out to prove that the languages he termed 'Japhetic' (which included Georgian, Armenian, Abkhaz, and many others) were not the passive victims of Indo-European ascendancy. Marr situated these languages in genealogical relation to one another in a family tree, the first iteration of which categorized 'Japhetic' as one branch alongside 'Semitic' and 'Hamitic' of a single 'Noetic' family.[17] Establishing the existence of a Japhetic family allowed Marr to argue that the Caucasus' languages, far from being isolated, possessed a creative vitality which scholars had largely failed to appreciate. The region's identity to Western scholars was overdetermined by several discourses, none of which did justice to its historical agency. Popular Biblical exegeses associated it with the landing of Noah's ark and the point from which Noah's progeny diffused.[18] A new resonance was added by Blumenbach who, on account of his analysis of a skull originating in the Caucasus, famously coined the term 'Caucasian' for 'white' in the fivefold division of mankind. [19] Neither of these associations did anything to overcome Europeans' unfamiliarity with the region's history and sense of alienation when encountering its languages and cultures. Thus, Marr's first move as a scholar was to construct his own rival to the Indo-European family tree which eventually grew in scope, encompassing the marginalized languages of Europe, Asia, and Africa (including such far-flung examples as Burushaski in the Pamirs and the

[17] Nikolaj Marr, 'O čanskom jazyke' [1910], in *Izbranny raboty*, i (1933), pp. 39-49 (p. 48). See also Thomas 1957, p. 14.
[18] See Robert Triomphe, 'La Mythologie 'japhétique': Marr entre le Caucase, la Bible et la Grèce', in *Un paradigme perdu: la linguistique marriste* (Cahiers de l'ILSL, no. 20), ed. by Patrick Sériot (Lausanne: Institut de linguistique et des sciences du langage, Université de Lausanne , 2005), pp. 311-41 (pp. 327-30).
[19] Banton 1987, p. 6. 'Dans l'espèce humaine, il [Blumenbach] compta les cinq variétés suivantes qui, en se perpétuant, devinrent les races *caucasique*, *mongolique*, *éthiopique*, *américaine* et *malaise*.' Firmin 1885, p. 22. Blumenbach's observation married neatly with the myth that the purest and most beautiful white people were to be found among the Circassians on the Black Sea coast. Robert Bogdan, 'Race, Showmen, Disability, and the Freak Show', in *The Invention of Race: Scientific and Popular Representations*, ed. by Nicolas Bancel, Thomas David, and Dominic Thomas (New York: Routledge, 2014), pp. 195-208 (pp. 200-1).

language of African 'Bushmen') in a single unifying structure.[20] The initially impetus came from his desire to place the Caucasus on the map. Later, Marr developed a more ambitious global theory of language which the underlying tenets of linguistic evolutionism. He argued, simultaneously, that 'primitive' morphology did not prevent languages from adapting to new circumstances and that individual languages (genealogical descent notwithstanding) could undergo a transition from one morphological type to another: a language such as Basque (an early addition to the Japhetic family) possessed a 'transitional' morphology half-way between agglutination and inflection, and languages in general were liable to undergo sudden 'revolutionary shifts [sdvigi]' from one type to another.[21] Languages' genetic descent did not predetermine their success or failure because Marr held inherited traits to be subordinate to acquired adaptations. Marr's theoretical innovations aimed at articulating a unified account of global linguistic development which did not lead to the triumph of one variety or family over all others; an ambition which closely paralleled Firmin's attempt to divorce the march of civilization from the triumph of the white or European race.[22]

These commitments placed Firmin and Marr at odds with the intellectual climate in which they lived. Their belief that universal progress could contain multiple parallel, but comparable, developmental trajectories contradicted a prevailing view of evolution which treated difference in terms of unequal variation of a single ideal. This idea is present *in nuce* in Blumenbach's view of racial differentiation as the result of 'degeneration' of man's single ancestral type, with the white 'Caucasian' race emerging as superior to the other races of man.[23] The degermation thesis straddled the boundary between scientific and cultural discourses, as evidenced by Gobineau's tripartite division of races. An additional division of humanity, embedded within Gobineau's *Essai* but widely found in other authors, followed lines of descent from Noah's three sons Sem, Ham, and Japheth: it fed into

[20] Nikolai [Nikolaj] Marr, 'The Japhetites' [1922]d, trans. by Anna Kurkova, *Interventions: International Journal of Postcolonial Studies*, forthcoming, published online (2020) < https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/1369801X.2020.1813607 > [Accessed 29 December 2021], 1-15 (p. 7) ; Marr 1926a, p. iv.
[21] Marr [1920], p. 109; Marr 1922b p. 15.
[22] Marr at one point described his work as tending towards a 'monistically constructed theory of language.' Marr 1926a, p. iv. As we shall see, Firmin framed his ideas as consistent with a monogenetic account of race (ERH, 115).
[23] Although Blumenbach may have meant 'not deterioration so much as the kinds of modification that arise as one generation succeeds another', Banton 1987, p. 6.

a linguistic taxonomy (of 'Semitic', 'Hamitic'—used to refer to several African languages–and 'Japhetic' languages; the latter being an archaic term for 'Indo-European').[24] Marr's adoption of the term 'Japhetic' for his family of languages challenged, among other things, the presumption of the unequal merits of the three branches, as we shall see. In similar fashion, Firmin did not reject this conventional division of humanity out of hand but argued instead that the three elements should be treated as equals, as evidenced by his reclaiming of ancient Egypt in the name of the Hamites ('les Chamites', ERH 251).

In what follows we will examine the origin and coherence of the dominant evolutionary discourse before examining how Firmin and Marr themselves understood the genealogy of modern evolutionary thought. Following this, we will compare their respective schemes of polycentric evolution by examining two federating concepts: 'laws' and 'origins.' The concept of developmental law was useful to our two thinkers because it allowed them to compare societies and cultures that were widely separated from one another in time and space based on the understanding that they all must pass through the same sequence of development. For Firmin, diverse societies can be compared because they are all bound to traverse the same 'étapes de la civilisation' (ERH, 405) during their development. For Marr, the existence of a universal 'palaeontological record' lying below the surface level of linguistic variance means that even the most seemingly divergent languages can be compared based on their position in the global linguistic process: he borrowed the term 'palaeontology' for his method of linguistic analysis because he claimed it delved deeper in time than conventional comparativism.[25] The principle of law-governed development was combined by our thinkers with a theory of evolution as emerging from multiple centres. In theorizing a multiplicity of origins, our thinkers

[24] Gobineau [1853-5], p. 354. For Gobineau's linguistic theses see Dreher 1970, pp. 91-4. One of the most famous advocates of the now-superseded category of 'Hamitic' languages was Carl Meinhof, who used it to refer to one of three main linguistic families on the continent alongside 'Bantu' and 'Sudanic/Nigritic'. Sara Pugach, *Africa in Translation: A History of Colonial Linguistics in Germany and Beyond, 1814-1945* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2012), p. 4. Building on Leibniz's distinction between 'Semitic' and 'Japhetic' languages, the comparative linguist Rasmus Rask used the latter term ('japetisk' in his native Danish) to refer to the Indo-European family. E.F.K Koerner, 'Observations on the Sources, Transmission, and Meaning of 'Indo-European' and Related Terms in the Development of Linguistics' [1981]a, in E.F.K Koerner, *Practicing Linguistic Historiography* (Amsterdam and Philadelphia: John Benjamins, 1989), pp. 149-177 (p. 151).

[25] Nikolaj Marr, 'Ob jafetičeskoj teorii' [1924]b, in *Izbrannye raboty*, III (1934), pp. 1-34 (pp. 7, 12). Marr was not the first to use the term 'linguistic palaeontology.' Cf. Ruth Römer, *Sprachwissenschaft und Rassenideologie in Deutschland* (Munich: Fink, 1985), pp. 64-5.

made pragmatic borrowings, including from the theory of polygenesis, according to which separate races constitute distinct species with their respective origin points.[26] We will examine the treatment of these themes in Firmin's *De l'Égalité* and, in the case of Marr, several short pieces, which include his programmatic pamphlet *Japhetic Caucasus and the Third Ethnic Element in the Formation of Mediterranean Culture* (1920).

## 1.2 Untimely Ideas: Against the *Stammbaum*

The classificatory and hierarchizing impulse so widespread across the branches of thought to which Firmin and Marr responded can be traced to a dominant philosophical understanding of origins and growth which crystallized at the start of the nineteenth century. Counter-intuitively, it was not a belief in the fundamental difference between individual linguistic and racial varieties that caused them to be categorized hierarchically, but rather the fact that they were viewed as unequal instantiations of a single underlying process. Following the previous century's debates over the nature of organic being, a new Life Science emerged which treated all processes of growth and development, occurring in nature and culture alike, as part of a single cosmological *unfolding* from a single point of origin.[27] Whereas the cosmos first existed in a state of unity, development entailed differentiation and specialization.[28] Among the other applications it lent itself to, this scheme offered a compelling way to account for human physical and cultural differences: the observable variety of humanity and its cultural products could be understood as the result of differentiation—or degeneration—from a single original prototype.[29] A fateful consequence of this unified theory of development was that, once primitive unity had given way to variety, it was difficult to see how these varieties could be

[26] Cf. Young 1995, p. 9.
[27] Sarah M. Pourciau, *The Writing of Spirit: Soul, System, and the Roots of Language Science* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2017), pp. 23-33.
[28] This idea cropped up in Herbert Spencer's theory of 'epigenesis' to which we will return. Cf. Brandist 2015, p. 214.
[29] Not everyone, of course, believed that this model was more than 'metaphor' or a useful heuristic device. As the novelist George Eliot ruefully remarked (herself a philosopher of science as well as a novelist), this philosophically necessary point of origin may be nothing more than 'the make-believe of a beginning.' Sally Shuttleworth, *George Eliot and Nineteenth-Century Science: The Make-Believe of a Beginning* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1984), p. 1.

compared on equal terms. Growth was understood to occur by means of divergence, and the resulting varieties (of race, culture, language) were readily interpreted as unequal in their vigour, beauty, sophistication, or fitness, with some destined to remain inferior or even die out altogether.[30] Difference between varieties of race and language was understood not in an absolute sense but in terms of differently successful renditions of the same process; thus, unity of evolutionary process and inequality were inextricably combined. And the culmination of this process of divergent evolution typically foresaw the victory of the most successful variant over all others.

The fields of linguistics and evolutionary biology were equally receptive to this model. Through a series of intellectual exchanges between Charles Darwin, the zoologist Ernst Haeckel, and the comparative linguist August Schleicher, an influential model of speciation and the development of linguistic varieties emerged within a short space of time.[31] The 'Stammbaum' or 'family tree' model, versions of

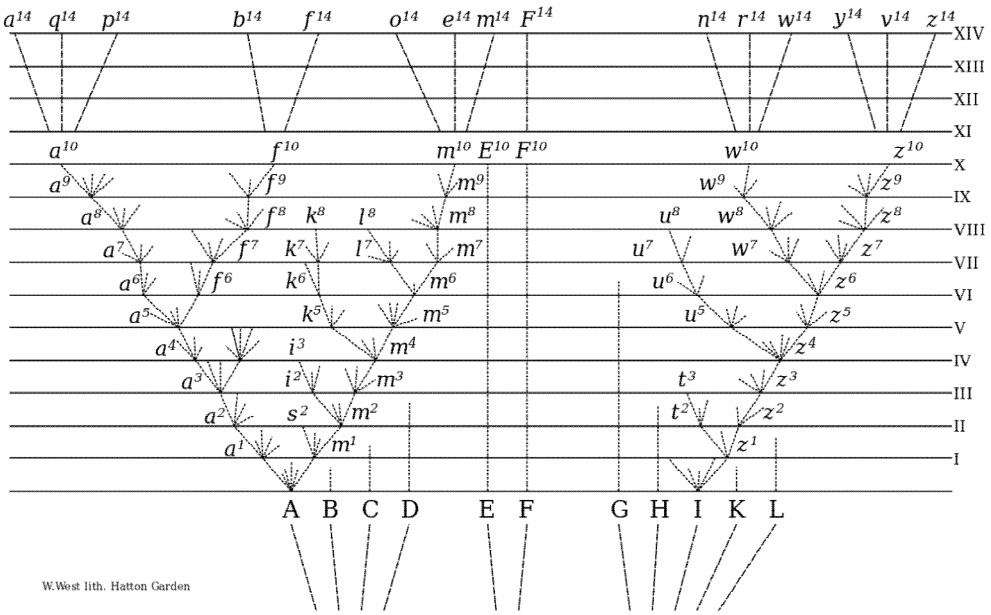


Figure 1: Charles Darwin, Diagram of species, 1859.

[30] Aboriginal Australians, for instance, were by mid-century commonly held to occupy 'the very lowest rungs of the evolutionary ladder' because, although undoubtedly part of the common family of man, they had remained 'isolated' for millennia. Patrick Brantlinger, *Dark Vanishings: Discourse on the Extinction of Primitive Races, 1800-1930* (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 2003), p. 164.

[31] Robert J. Richards, 'Darwin on Mind, Morals and Emotions', in *The Cambridge Companion to Darwin*, ed. by Jonathan Hodge and Gregory Radick (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), pp. 96-119 (p. 110); E.F.K Koerner, 'Schleichers Einfluss auf Haeckel: Schlaglichter auf die Abhängigkeit zwischen linguistischen und biologischen Theorien im 19. Jahrhundert' [1981]b, in E.F.K Koerner, *Practicing Linguistic Historiography* (Amsterdam and Philadelphia: John Benjamins, 1989), 211-232 (pp. 214, 218-23).

which appeared in Schleicher's first essay on Indo-European linguistic diversification (1853) and Darwin's *Origin of Species* (1859), could explain both how a single *Ursprache* produced increasingly dissimilar 'daughter languages' and how (in Darwin's words) the descendants of a single species, by becoming 'more diversified in structure', could 'lead to the most different or divergent variations […] being preserved and accumulated by natural selection.'[32] The diagram, which Darwin included in the first edition of the *Origin of Species* (Figure 1.), illustrated his principle of divergence by depicting the branching-off of varieties from Species 'A' to 'L' over the course of time, the passage of which is depicted by the regularly spaced horizontal lines.[33] The abuses to which Darwin's theories have been put are well known, and some of them formed the object of Firmin's critique. Although his scientific contribution helped cement the view that humanity comprises single species, an idea tending to support the equality of races, his theory that different varieties within a species possessed traits making them more evolutionarily competitive was frequently invoked to bolster existing notions of racial inequality.[34] The implications of the unified evolutionary theory for linguistics were in some ways more subtle. Schleicher's interpretation of phonetic change as a 'decline' from an initial state of 'perfection' could be used to rank genetically related languages according to their faithfulness to the *Ursprache*.[35] Of even greater significance for Marr was the widely held view that genetically distinct languages followed divergent evolutionary paths. The Victorian linguist Friedrich Max Müller, for instance, argued that Semitic and 'Aryan' (i.e. Indo-European) languages exhibited different morphological traits which were attributable to their respective proto-languages. [36] The Semitic-Aryan duality stemmed from a primordial rift within the unity of human

[32] August Schleicher, 'Die ersten Spaltungen des indogermanischen Urvolkes', *Allgemeine Monatsschrift für Wissenschaft und Literatur* (August 1853), 786-87 (p. 787), reproduced by Koerner [1981]b, p. 219. Charles Darwin, *On the Origin of Species by Means of Natural Selection, or The Preservation of Favoured Races in the Struggle for Life* (London: Murray, 1859), pp. 116-7.
[33] Darwin's diagram lends itself to various interpretations. 'The blurring of distinctions between taxa designated at the variety and species levels in the species$_L$ domain is summoned by Darwin as support for a more general argument about the blurring of the historical relations of groups. As one quickly perceives from the few pithy pages of argument that follow, the coordinates of his diagram are purely relative. The horizontal lines, representing time, can represent a hundred, or thousand, or ten thousand or millions of generations, or even geological ages.' Philip R. Sloan, 'Originating Species: Darwin on the Species Problem', in *The Cambridge Companion to the 'Origin of Species'*, ed. by Michael Ruse and Robert J. Richards (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), pp. 67-86 (p. 81).
[34] Young 1995, p. 13.
[35] Tuska Benes, *In Babel's Shadow: Language, Philology, and the Nation in Nineteenth-Century Germany* (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 2008), p. 230.
[36] Olender 1989, pp. 161-3.

language and continued to shape the diverging worldviews (and historical fates) of the people who spoke the descendant languages.[37]

Firmin and Marr both thought that scientific progress was going off the rails because the prevailing unitary theory of evolution was nothing more than a rehashing of an outmoded Biblical myth of creation. Both observed a general slowing of scientific progress despite promising starts made a century earlier. Firmin celebrated the genius of Jean-François Champollion, the famous decipherer of Egyptian hieroglyphs, who saw no issue in attributing black origins to pharaonic civilization (Firmin quotes his remark that 'l'Égypte est toute d'Afrique et non d'Asie'), but deplored the fact that, after Champollion's death, 'les études égyptologiques ont dû subir un arrêt sensible'[38]:

> Non-seulement ses disciples n'ont pu immédiatement continuer ses travaux, mais des savants d'une haute valeur, tels que Klaproth et Thomas Young, montrèrent une incrédulité obstinée devant le résultat acquis par les travaux du grand érudit. Quand F. Lenormant, Nestor L'hôte, en France, Rossellini, en Italie, et Lepsius, en Allemagne, reprirent la chaîne de ces études un moment interrompues, il ne fut plus question de l'ancienne race égyptienne. (ERH, 339)

Marr was similarly dismissive of European efforts to decipher cuneiform inscriptions in Persia. In a study of the Elamite language, preserved as part of the inscriptions of Darius the Great in Behistun, Marr noted that despite promising starts made in the 1830s by Eugène Burnouf and the formidable material advantages enjoyed by Western European scholars (including their 'systematicness' and the venerability of their traditions), knowledge of Elamite remained 'vague and dissatisfying'.[39]

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[37] See Trautmann 1997, pp. 177-8 for Max Müller connection between prehistoric Aryan expansion and modern-day British imperialism.

[38] I have been unable to find the original source of Champollion's remark, but it is reproduced by subsequent authors including Michelet. Jules Michelet, *La Bible de l'humanité* (Paris: Chamerot, 1864), p. 285. Champollion is quoted in Firmin 1885, p. 333.

[39] Nikolaj Marr, 'Vvedenie k rabote 'Opredelenie jazyka vtoroj kategorii Akhemenidskikh klinoobraznykh nadpisej po dannym jafetičeskogo jazykoznanija' [1914], in *Izbrannye raboty*, I (1933), pp. 50-8 (p. 50). Elamite was the second of three languages (which included Old Persian and Akkadian) found among the cuneiform inscriptions of Darius the Great in Behistun. Thomas 1957, p. 153, f. 16. Marr is quoting Burnouf's assessment that, as regards the language in which the cuneiform inscriptions were written, 'on n'a encore que des notions vagues et peu satisfaisantes.' Eugène Burnouf, *Mémoire sur deux inscriptions cunéiformes trouvées près d'Hamadan* (Paris: Imprimerie Royale, 1836), p. 2.

European scholars were destined to fail because they lacked an adequate framework of linguistic comparison. When they did reach for non-Indo-European languages to help decipher Elamite (indeed, some scholars proposed comparison with Georgian), they treated these language instrumentally (as a 'key' to unlock linguistic 'enigmas') and without sensitivity to their own unique properties.[40] In the examples cited by Firmin and Marr, scholarly shortcomings stemmed from a failure to acknowledge the autonomy of non-European cultures, a failure which manifested itself in the unwillingness of some to entertain the idea that black Africa could have produced Egyptian civilization and the inability of others to conduct linguistic comparisons outside the framework of Indo-European comparative linguistics. As a way out of this impasse, Firmin and Marr advanced a polycentric model of the world which acknowledged the equality and autonomy of different cultures. An obstacle preventing this vision from achieving widespread acceptance was the lingering influence of the Biblical myth of creation. The Book of Genesis explains the origin of the human race from a single couple and, in the story of Noah and his sons, accounts for racial difference in terms of degradation from the original archetype. Noah's third son Ham, taken to be the progenitor of the black race, incurs a curse, dealt to his own son Canaan, for having seen his father naked; the darker colour of Ham's progeny, according to popular traditions, manifests God's disfavour (ERH, 610-11).[41] By treating non-white races as inferior varieties within the single human species, the monogenetic theory, so Firmin argued, merely restated the Biblical account in different terms. Modern science viewed the black races as inferior compared to the white archetype ('dégradées […] pendant que les autres gardaient intacts les dons précieux du Créateur'), and this difference was consistent with a 'malédiction plus ou moins méritée' (ERH, 206).[42] Accordingly, Firmin decried the modern monogenetic theory as 'un article de foi tiré des traditions théologiques' (ERH, 115) for retaining this notion of black inferiority through degradation and making it compatible with a belief in the unity of the human race. The endurance of 'cette vieille tradition biblique, si bien confinée dans un coin du cerveau européen'

[40] Marr [1914], pp. 50-1.
[41] Cf. 'Ham', in John L. McKenzie, *Dictionary of the Bible* (London: Chapman, 1965), p. 333; Winthrop D. Jordan, *White over Black: American Attitudes Toward the Negro, 1550-1812* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1968), pp. 17-20.
[42] Significantly, for reasons that we shall see, Firmin is quoting Broca. Paul Broca, 'Mémoires sur l'hybridité' [1858-9], in *Mémoires d'anthropologie*, 5 vols (Paris: Reinwald, 1871-81), III (1877), pp. 321-616 (p. 566).

(ERH, 614) allows modern writers to reconcile the unity of the family of man with a belief in black inferiority according to Noah's curse: 'May God make space for Japheth,/may he live in the tents of Shem,/and let Canaan be his slave!'[43] Marr likewise condemned the ethical contradictions engendered by the 'religious worldview' which continued to determine Europe's approach to other cultures despite the intervening centuries and the rise of humanism.[44] Christian teaching retained the idea of a 'unity of origin of human culture' and emphasized the 'divinity of creation' but stressed above all the 'chosenness (izbrannost')' of an elect people.[45] 'In contravention of its own basic dogma,' the religious worldview fostered a belief that the world's peoples (*narody*) are separated by 'differences in their innate qualities and abilities and, consequently, differences in the degree of their entitlement to the fruits of human culture.'[46] The advent of linguistics in the nineteenth century did nothing to change this worldview and led to 'the Indo-European peoples, the Indo-European race' assuming the mantle of 'chosen people'.[47] Another consequence is that in the contemporary world (and Marr includes Russia within this), there is no possibility of acknowledging the 'genetic relatedness of coloured people [černokožikh] to our psyche, to our language.'[48] Marr may have, symbolically, identified his favoured group of languages with Noah's son Japheth. However, this identification was not an assertion of 'Aryan' supremacy but an attempt to place the neglected Caucasus on an equal footing with the Semitic and Hamitic languages. The Japhetic theory served the same function as Firmin's thesis that Egypt was a 'Hamitic' civilization: asserting the autonomy and agency of non-European cultures and peoples.

However, despite the pervasive hardening of prejudice, neither Firmin nor Marr regarded the age in which they lived as wholly benighted intellectually. There were contemporary intellectual currents which both were able to tap into and which held the promise of universal development and the expansion of freedom and enlightenment while also being seemingly less encumbered by racial taxonomies. Chief among these was the philosophical school of positivism, founded by Auguste

[43] *The New Jerusalem Bible* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1985), Genesis 9.27.
[44] Marr [1920], p. 91.
[45] Ibid, p. 91.
[46] Ibid, p. 92.
[47] Ibid, p. 92.
[48] Ibid, p. 89.

Comte and so called because it only recognized the validity of knowledge derived from experience ('positive', as opposed to 'theological' or 'metaphysical' knowledge), thus marking a rupture with inherited religious dogma.[49] Positivism, in the words of Comte, claimed to offer 'le seul vrai moyen rationnel de mettre en évidence les lois logiques de l'esprit humain, qui ont été recherchées jusqu'ici par des voies si peu propres à les dévoiler.'[50] The key term 'rationnel' sets Comte's programme apart from other systems of thought which remained mired in metaphysical views of the world. Positivists claimed that the same unerring laws governed physiological and social life, and that if science was to do justice to both these fields, it must be conducted according to a carefully worked out programme with the proviso that hypotheses constantly be assessed against empirical data.[51] Positivism held the possibility of universal development according to unwavering laws of progress and provided an intellectual programme which was highly critical of received wisdom. For this reason, it resonated strongly in parts of the world disadvantaged by European epistemologies and, as we shall see, proved fruitful for our two thinkers.[52]

In *De l'Égalité*, Firmin is unabashed in his admiration for Comte, as evidenced by his work's subtitle 'Anthropologie positive' and in his humble prefatory acknowledgement that any merits his work may possess derive entirely from 'l'excellence de la méthode positive que j'ai essayé d'appliquer à l'anthropologie, en étayant toutes mes inductions sur des principes déjà reconnus par les sciences définitivement constituées' (ERH, ix). Firmin echoes the tenor of Comte's thought by laying out a programme of his own which he believed was 'rational' and would guard against 'arbitrary' categorizations. Comte's emphasis on method stemmed from his belief that the hierarchies which structured scientific knowledge should correspond to the hierarchies governing phenomena in nature.[53] Although science could go off the rails, there was no reason Comte saw for scientific

[49] Cf. 'Positif', in *Le Petit Robert: Dictionnaire de la langue française*, ed. by A. Rey and J. Rey-Debove (Paris: Dictionnaires Le Robert, 1988), p. 1490.
[50] Auguste Comte, *Principes de philosophie positive* (Paris: Baillière et fils, 1868), p. 118. Quoted in part in Rey and Rey-Debove, 'Positif, p. 1490.
[51] Shuttleworth 1984, p. 5; Gertrud Lenzer, 'Introduction: Auguste Comte and Modern Positivism, in *Auguste Comte and Positivism*, ed. by Gertrud Lenzer (New Brunswick, NJ and London: Transaction Publishers, 2010), pp. xi-lxxxii (p. lxxi),
[52] See, Brandist 2015, p. 53, Ralph Lee Woodward, ed, *Positivism in Latin America, 1850-1900* (Lexington MA: Heath, 1971).
[53] Lenzer 2010, p. lxxi.

knowledge to be unable to capture the immanent processes governing nature and to extend these to the more specialized realm of human social relations:

> L'étude directe du monde extérieur a pu seule […] produire et développer la grande notion des *lois* de la nature, fondement indispensable de toute philosophie positive, et qui, par suite de son extension graduelle et continue à des phénomènes des moins en moins réguliers, a dû être enfin appliquée à l'étude même de l'homme et de la société, dernier terme de son entière généralisation.[54]

Firmin closely echoed Comte's belief in a natural law-governed order and the capacity for scientific enquiry to arrive at this truth if its exposition of facts followed a structure that was naturally given:

> La saine philosophie, réduite ainsi à une synthèse de toutes les notions et de toutes les conceptions, consiste alors à se conformer aux lois de la nature, tout en concourant avec intelligence à l'harmonisation de tous les éléments, hommes et choses, répandus sur l'orbe immense de notre planète. (ERH, 248)

The Comtean vision of world harmony and the nesting of humanity (or, in Firmin's terms, a plurality of 'hommes') within cosmic order is readily adopted by Firmin. At the start of his book, Firmin spends some time defining 'anthropologie' as a holistic discipline studying mankind in both general and specific terms: 'l'homme' set against other animals and 'les races humaines' as compared to one another (ERH, 18-19). Comte's sequencing of the branches of science was useful to Firmin because, in accordance with the principle that the particular is subordinate to the general, it meant that enquiry into the nature of race needed to acknowledge the overarching unity of humankind. Thus, disciplines such as 'ethnographie' and 'ethnologie' which differentiate man in ever more specific ways are admissible for Firmin so long as they do not violate the principle that subordinates the specific to the general. 'Ethnographie' identifies and describes the varieties of humankind while 'ethnologie' divides them 'en races distinctes, étudie leurs organismes variés, considère les variétés typiques' (ERH, 18); the two disciplines are responsible for obtaining empirical data but are subordinate to Anthropology which is alone capable

[54] Auguste Comte, *Cours de philosophie positive*, 6 vols (Paris: Rouen frères (Bachelier), 1830-42), III (1838), p. 271. Also quoted in Lenzer 2010, p. 163.

of producing a synthesis of knowledge. Anthropology relies upon properly delimited 'catégories ethniques', which are identified by ethnographic observation, but it must also proceed inductively and avoid 'une hiérarchisation arbitraire des races humaines ou de leurs aptitudes (ERH, 19). The value of Comte's ideas to Firmin was twofold. Firstly, Comtean positivism asserted the universal applicability of its laws of social progress irrespective of race: 'les lois fondamentales de l'évolution humaine, qui posent la base philosophique du régime final, conviennent nécessairement à tous les climats et à toutes les races, sauf de simples inégalités de vitesse.'[55] Comte's qualification about the differential factor of speed in a unilinear model of progress did prove a stumbling block for Firmin as we shall see. For now, however, it is important simply to note that Firmin shared Comte's belief in a universal human potential for progress, presented as a 'patrimoine commun de l'humanité' which transcends racial difference and ensures that even the most 'savage' people can undertake 'si tard qu'il soit, l'ascension merveilleuse qui a conduit les peuples civilisés à leur degré de perfectionnement actuel' (ERH 424). Secondly, Comte's intense preoccupation with correcting errors of reasoning and avoiding the 'distinctions arbitraires' so prevalent in existing schemes for coordinating scientific research offered Firmin a useful example for critiquing the 'théories arbitraires' (ERH, 225) proposed by contemporary race scientists and their aprioristic taxonomies of human difference.[56] This was especially useful when the theories in question seemed to present ample empirical data. For example, Firmin lambasted Broca and his fellow anthropologist Paul Topinard for their correlation of skull measurements with ethnic types by noting that each of the types so identified was a statistical fiction 'qui n'existe pas dans la nature et qui varie selon le caprice de l'investigateur' (ERH, 225). The statistical measures are thus invalidated because the data were collected and organized following an *a priori* division of ethnic types. The catalogue of scientific facts contained in these sections of *De l'Égalité* serves to discredit naïve empiricism, which Firmin looks down upon, variously qualifying it as '*vulgaire*', '*grossier*' and '*arbitraire*' (ERH, 488, 242, 175). This distrust of empiricism closely echoes Comte, who intended his positivist system to address the

[55] Auguste Comte, *Système de politique positive, ou Traité de sociologie, instituant la religion de l'humanité*, 4 vols (Paris: Mathias, 1851-54), i (1851), p. 390. Also quoted by Tzvetan Todorov, *Nous et les autres: la réflexion française sur la diversité humaine* (Paris: Seuil, 1989), p. 52.
[56] Comte 1830-42, i (1830), p. I 97.

errors stemming from 'l'empirisme systématique que l'on s'efforce d'imposer aux observations sociales, surtout historiques, lorsqu'on y interdit dogmatiquement, à titre d'impartialité, l'emploi d'aucune théorie quelconque.'[57] To be positivist, neither induction nor deduction on its own can suffice.[58] Although positivism insists that hypotheses be backed up by empirical observation, Comte recognized that the act of observation itself proceeds by making theories about the world and testing them against sense data.[59]

Despite asserting late in life that his theories had from the outset been informed by dialectical materialism, Marr's understanding of linguistic evolution was thoroughly steeped in positivism.[60] Marr's later interpolations of Marx, Engels, and Hegel into his evolutionary theories could not mask the formative influence of the British positivist Herbert Spencer, one of his earliest sources of philosophical inspiration.[61] Much like Comte, Spencer tried to identify the common laws governing organic and social evolution.[62] Although Spencer, along with Comte, came to be discredited in the Soviet Union as anti-dialectic, his covert influence was apparent even in the later elaborations of Marr's theory of linguistic evolution.[63] As Marr knew from his readings of Engels, the historical dialectic involves violent shifts in which the old social order loses its 'right to exist' (Existenzrecht).[64] Spencer's evolution, by contrast, was cumulative and foresaw primitive forms becoming organically transformed into more advanced forms.[65] What was at stake for Marr in the contest between dialectical and evolutionary theories of society—two positions

[57] Ibid, IV (1839), p. 417.
[58] Lenzer 2010, pp. lxxv-lxxvi.
[59] Warren Schmaus, 'A Reappraisal of Comte's Three-State Law', *History and Theory* 21.2 (1982), 248-266 (p. 254).
[60] Cf. Nikolaj Marr, 'Marks i problemy jazyka' [1934]a in *Izbrannye raboty*, ii (1936), pp. 444-59 (pp. 444-5).
[61] Mikhankova 1949, p. 13, f. 3; Brandist 2015, p. 208.
[62] Cf. Stocking: '(Spencer's) sociocultural evolution was explicitly and systematically part of a broader cosmic process'. Stocking 1987, p. 226)
[63] For a typical Soviet assessment of positivism, highly critical of Comte's and Spencer's claims to have constructed 'a doctrine of the most general patterns of the reality known to science', see T. I. Oizerman, *The Main Trends in Philosophy: A Theoretical Analysis of the History of Philosophy*, trans. by H. Campbell Creighton (Moscow: Progress, 1984), p. 204.
[64] Friedrich Engels, 'Ludwig Feuerbach und der Ausgang der klassischen deutschen Philosophie' [1886], in *Karl Marx Friedrich Engels Werke*, 44 vols (Berlin: Dietz, 1956-83), xxii (1962), pp. 265-73 (p. 266), quoted in Marr [1934]a, p. 444.
[65] Michael W. Taylor, *The Philosophy of Herbert Spencer* (London and New York: Continuum, 2007), p. 59. Spencer himself wrote that 'we must admit that the gravitation of an organism's structure from an indefinitely homogeneous to a definitely heterogeneous state, must be cumulative in successive generations, if forces causing it continue to act.' Herbert Spencer, *Principles of Biology*, 2 vols (London: Williams and Norgate, 1864-7), i (1864), p. 430. Quoted in Taylor 2007, p. 71.

which had not yet become ossified into opposing philosophical schools—was the question of whether the later stages of linguistic evolution retained an organic continuity with earlier stages, or whether the 'archaic' was cast aside in the upward march of progress.[66] Spencer described how primitive forms of biological and social organization evolved into complex forms and argued—in a Lamarckian vein—that organisms themselves are capable of passing on acquired traits, meaning that their developmental path was not predetermined by genetics.[67] These ideas appealed to Marr, who argued that all languages, irrespective of their genetic filiation, are capable of evolving upwards to the final stage of global linguistic development. One compelling early rendition of his global linguistic theory allows us to read the opposition between Japhetic and Indo-European linguistics in terms of opposing theories of evolution:

> In Japhetic linguistics, the birth, growth and latter (or ultimate) attainment of human language can be pictured as an upright pyramid. From its broad base, which figures a prehistoric stage that was characterized by multiple mollusc-like embryonic languages, human language, passing through a series of typological transformations, surges towards the top, which is to say the single world language. In Indo-European linguistics, with its single proto-language, linguistic palaeontology is reduced to a pyramid standing on its head with its base in the air.[68]

Marr's Japhetic theory, then, is based around a theory of convergent evolution, in which a single world *language* arises once the multiple, geographically dispersed *languages* have completed the same progressive stadial evolution. The alternative 'upended' pyramid represents the way scholars conventionally view linguistic evolution: in terms of the descent of related languages from a single (Indo-European, Semitic, etc.) whereby the linguistic descendants have inherited ('erebt', in Schleicher's terms) their defining traits from their common ancestor.[69] This genetic account fosters the view that non-related languages follow divergent developmental paths, a view which is potentially consistent with the argument that some languages

[66] For a discussion of the continued relevance of Spencer to early Russian Marxists such as Plekhanov, see Brandist 2015, pp. 43-4.
[67] For Spencer's Lamarckism, see Stocking 1987, pp. 133-6.
[68] Marr [1924]b, p. 31.
[69] Schleicher 1853, p. 786.

are inherently superior to others. As we can see above, Marr sought to dissolve distinct genealogical trajectories within a single evolutionary process in which no language, however 'archaic', is excluded from the culmination of history. As we shall see, Firmin made an analogous argument about race relations at the end of history. Marr's global theory of linguistic evolution forecasts a harmonious fusion redolent of Comte's vision of the 'altruistic' culmination of history as evoked by Firmin ('les sentiments altruistes […] font de l'humanité un être concret dont les parties solitaires agissent, travaillent et progressent dans une destinée commune.' ERH, 248). The principle which enables Marr's vision of future linguistic convergence is the 'law-bound' ('zakonomernyj') regularity governing linguistic change in all places and times.[70] The study of linguistic change over time, which Marr termed 'linguistic palaeontology', may appear complex but can in fact be reduced to a set of ordered principles. Behind the apparent 'chaos' there is 'a natural-economic order, a social-psychological law, which declares itself among other things in linguistic sounds and accords'.[71] Linguistic 'order' transcends genealogical distinctions and takes the form of the innumerable phonetic and semantic 'equivalences' which Marr observes between languages which are separated by vast stretches of time and space.[72] Marr always claimed that his laws proceeded from his intimate first-hand knowledge of the languages in question, which he contrasted with the 'mere technical understanding of the material, devoid of living breath' characteristic of his Western colleagues' work.[73] Marr was characteristically positivist in his foregrounding of method (even if his method has struck many observers as absurd) and his assertion that scholarly constructs can and must embody the structures of the natural phenomena they describe. Hence, he observed that the convergent evolution of languages promoted 'the establishment of regular equivalences in the phonetic medium [zakonomernoj soglasovannosti zvukovykh sredstv]' and attempted to mirror these equivalences in his universally applicable 'analytic alphabet' which purportedly offered the 'complete, systematic expression

[70] Cf. Sériot 2014, pp. 132, 172.
[71] Marr [1924]b, p. 12.
[72] For instance, Marr stated that Japhetic languages could be classified as belonging to the sibilant, spirant or sonoric branch, and that the sibilant branch is further divided into *whistling* [svistjaščij] and *hushing* [šipjaščij] groups. The *whistling* 's' has its counterpart in the *hushing* 'sh'. Ibid, p. 5. Marr's semantic 'laws' will be discussed in due course, but their most systematic study has been undertaken by Velmezova who provides a useful overview of the universal conceptual clusters Marr traced back to prehistory. Velmezova 2007, pp. 344-6.
[73] Marr 1922b, p. 22.

in letters of the entire sound system of any given language, constructed on the basis of regular phonetic correspondences'.[74]

Firmin and Marr were far from uncritical in their use of positivism, which was not always accommodating of difference. Although Comte believed he had arrived at the laws of universal social progress inductively, his frame of reference was European. His universalism, as Tzvetan Todorov has observed, sought to flatten difference as it was premised on the idea that '[il] est possible d'établir--à l'aide de la science--*la* bonne constitution, qui ne tardera pas à s'imposer à tous les peuples, en surmontant les différences nationales'.[75] Firmin, as we shall see next, had to carve out a space for cultural difference within Comte's evolutionary scheme. Marr is often grouped alongside representatives of 'dissident Indo-Europeanism', a loose association of thinkers who were sceptical of the claims of mainstream linguists to have formulated unerring linguistic laws which thereby made the study of history external to the evolution of languages.[76] These 'dissidents' felt that so-called unerring laws ran roughshod over local linguistic variance. Marr's assignment to this 'movement' is only partially accurate and risks obscuring his commitment to the idea that linguistic change can be represented adequately in terms of laws. Marr fully embraced laws but rejected the comparativist doctrine of law-bound descent from single proto-languages.[77]

It was their commitment to universal history and progress which set Firmin and Marr apart from many of their contemporaries on the periphery. Faced with the same historiographical and geopolitical problems of exclusion from 'the West', many peripheral thinkers viewed universalism as inherently inequitable and asserted, instead, the existence of radical difference as the only hope for bringing marginalized peoples onto the world stage. Firmin shared much in common with his contemporary, the prolific black West-Indian intellectual Edward Wilmot Blyden,

[74] Nikolaj Marr, 'Pis'mo i jazyk buduščego (Ob odnoj iz grjaduščikh zadač Vsesojuznoj Akademii nauk)', *Vestnik znanija* 15 (1925), 1010-1016 (p. 1012) < http://crecleco.seriot.ch/textes/Marr25a.html > [accessed 14 October 2021]; Nikolaj Marr, 'Abkhazskij analitičeskij alfavit (k voprosu o reformakh pis'ma)' [1926]b, In *Izbrannye raboty*, 2 (1936), pp. 321-351 (pp. 335-6).
[75] Todorov 1989, p. 52.
[76] Cf. Brandist 2015, p. 208.
[77] For a discussion of this position as advocated by Schleicher, see Koerner [1981]b, pp. 215-6.

including membership in the nascent Pan-African movement.[78] Much like Firmin, Blyden, who wrote extensively on the future of nationhood and society in Africa, denied that racial inferiority played a part in inhibiting the black social progress. Moreover, although he adhered to a binary opposition between 'civilization' and 'barbarism', Blyden like Firmin did not think that civilization was a uniquely white attainment or that Blacks ought to blindly imitate Europe in order to progress: 'the two races are not moving in the same groove with an immeasurable distance between them, but on parallel lines.'[79] Thus, Blyden introduced a differential element within an otherwise unilinear model of progress. Firmin adopted a very similar position, as we shall see; however, Blyden introduced an element of essential racial and cultural difference that is absent from Firmin's polycentric universalism. For example, whereas Firmin thought the Comtean division of knowledge offered a valid model for education in Haiti, Blyden's argument of incommensurate difference separating races brought with it the requirement for racially specific cultural education:

> we must listen to the songs of our unsophisticated brethren as they sing of their history, as they tell of their traditions, of the wonderful and mysterious events of their tribal or national life, of the achievements of what we call their superstitions […]. We shall in this way get back the strength of the race, like the giant of the ancients, who always gained strength, for his conflict with Hercules, whenever he touched his Mother Earth.[80]

Blyden's vision of an African educational programme foresaw the individual's intellectual development as a recapitulation of the cultural history of his (perhaps unacknowledged) ancestors, down to a chthonic base. The alternative, 'indiscriminate reading [of] European literature', would lead to mental imbalance.[81] Blyden's belief that cultural specificity is imprinted on the individual is wholly antithetical to Firmin's ideal that a man of genius (and for him it is always a man) is capable of transcending the circumstances of his birth. Thus, while one's native

[78] Cf. Gershom Williams, 'Anténor Firmin, Pan-Africanism, and the Struggle for Race Vindication', in *Reconstructing the Social Sciences and Humanities*, ed. by Joseph and Mocombe (2021), pp. 123-34 (p. 132).
[79] Edward Wilmot Blyden, *Christianity, Islam and the Negro Race* (London: Whittingham, 1887), p. 317. As quoted by Mudimbe 1988, p. 118. The civilization vs. barbarism binary is discussed by Mudimbe. Ibid, p. 105.
[80] Blyden 1887, p. 106.
[81] Ibid, p. 94, as quoted by Mudimbe 1988, p. 123.

language may be better suited to certain forms of literary production than others, 'l'homme dont la pensée a acquis une élaboration supérieure, finit infailliblement par triumpher de ces difficultés' (ERH, 195). Blyden's view of cultures as closed entities cropped up in many different locales, not least Marr's Caucasus. From the perspective of many Western Europeans, the Caucasus was culturally alien to Europe despite the region's place in Biblical geography and the conventional identification, by Blumenbach, of the 'white' race as the 'Caucasian' race.[82] Some of Marr's contemporaries responded to European condescension in terms which did not fundamentally challenge the philosophical underpinnings of Western superiority by arguing, for instance, that 'anthropologically, the Georgian race is brachycephalous, as is proved by all the skull measurements as obtained by excavations in the Caucasus.'[83] This argument cropped up in Marr's first public intellectual dispute in which, still a student, he critiqued the opinion of one of his professors in St Petersburg, Aleksandr Tsagareli, to argue that Georgian was related to the Semitic languages.[84] Tsagareli, an academician of Georgian extraction, had published an article a decade earlier, which argued that Georgian and other languages of the Caucasus were isolated from all known language families, contrary to opinion of scholars such as Max Müller.[85] In addition, Tsagareli felt compelled to argue that this linguistic isolation did not equate to any racial separation of the Caucasus from Europe:

> The peoples of the Caucasus, as is well known, belong to the Caucasian race on account of their ethnographic and physical traits; some among them, such as the Cherkess and Georgians, are regarded as the finest specimens of that race […].[86]

While attacking Tsagareli's linguistic theses, Marr did not comment upon the ethnographic and racial arguments. In future he would continue vigorously opposing

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[82] An example of the Caucasus being perceived as marginal would include Keane 1896, i, p. 372, as cited in the Introduction.
[83] *Georgia and the Georgian Race: Restoration of Independent Georgian State after 117 Years' Domination by Russia* (London: Georgian National Committee, 1919), p. 9.
[84] Cf. Thomas 1957, pp. 2-3. Marr chose to publish his insights in the Georgian newspaper *Iveria* having been unable to find a publisher abroad or in St Petersburg. Mikhankova 1949, p. 29.
[85] Aleksandr Cagareli [Tsagareli], 'O predpologaemom srodstve gruzinskogo jazyka s indo-evropejskimi i turanskimi jazykami', *Žurnal Ministerstva Narodnogo Prosveščenija* 163 (1872), 46-60 (p. 59).
[86] Ibid, p. 59.

the claim that any language family is isolated from the rest of the world (behind 'Chinese walls' as he would later quip) and, while generally demurring over questions of the ethnic composition of modern-day societies, he always opposed attempts to assign languages to an original, ethnically pure speaking community.[87] It would be entirely fair to say that Marr shared Firmin's view of the 'nullité des rapports naturels qu'on a essayé d'établir entre le langage et la race' (ERH, 195). However, the most persistent target of Marr's criticism was less the argument that the Georgians were affiliated by race with Western Europe than the countervailing attempt to build an affirmative Georgian national identity based on irreducible cultural and linguistic separateness. Several notable contemporaries of Marr within Georgian academia sought to reinfuse the Georgian language with the primitive vitality of its most isolated and 'archaic' dialects.[88] These scholars saw internationalism as the enemy of cultural specificity; Marr's challenge as a scholar was to find a way of accommodating linguistic difference within his unified global theory of language, much as Firmin had to retain the idea of communicability between cultures even while arguing that civilization emerged in multiple parts of the globe independently of one another.

Firmin and Marr attempted to stay true to positivism while avoiding a levelling universalism hostile to difference; they did this by adopting a polycentric model of the world where multiple origin points exist, as well as multiple developmental trajectories which, while independent of one another, answer to the same set of laws. In so doing, Firmin and Marr hoped to overcome the limiting and essentialized taxonomies which sustained the belief that progress and civilization were the preserve of a select few peoples. The unitary theory of evolution had

[87] Nikolaj Marr, 'Jafetičeskaja teorija. Programma obščego kursa učenija ob jazyke' [1927], in *Izbrannye raboty* ii (1936), pp. 3-126 (p. 32). An instance of Marr's hesitancy over the ethnic composition of modern-day nations can be seen in his preface to an Abkhaz grammar published by his student Petr Čaraja. Nikolaj Marr, 'Predislovija redaktora', in P. Čaraja, *Ob otnošenii Abkhazskogo jazyka k jafetičeskim* (St Petersburg: Imperatorskaja Akademija Nauk: 1912), pp. v-vii (p. vii). For a brilliant analysis of Marr's interest in the origin of languages out of ethnically mixed, rather than pure, surroundings, see Marcello Cherchi and H. Paul Manning, *Disciplines and Nations: Niko Marr vs. his Georgian Students on Tbilisi State University and the Japhetidology/Caucasology Schmism* (Pittsburgh: Center for Russian and East European Studies, University of Pittsburgh, 2002), pp. 23-34,

[88] An instance of this view could be Akaki Shanidze's interest in the 'Pkhovian' dialects of Georgian in the mountainous north-eastern part of the country for what he considered their archaism. Shanidze hoped to reinvigorate Georgian literary language with the aid of these dialects supposedly more in tune with the country's past. Ibid, pp. 26-32.

fostered the dangerous belief in a 'concurrence vitale' (ERH, 648) leading to the eventual extinction of lesser variants. As Marr put it, the struggle for existence represented a 'simplified rendering of the life process whose deceptive clarity is the hallmark of abstract reflections'.[89] We will examine the rival conceptions of evolution proposed by Firmin and Marr according to their central structural elements, beginning with the concept of historical laws.

## 1.3 Laws

Thinking of historical development as guided by laws was potentially useful as it provided an impersonal and colour-blind principle standing beyond the boundaries of race, culture, and language. Invoking the authority of the 'lois immuables et éternelles' of scientific truths (ERH, 401) or the 'unbending conditions' of linguistic palaeontology offered a way to challenge the authority of scholarly constructs if these could be demonstrated to be 'sans base, incapable de résister à la moindre analyse' (ERH, 434) or, like the 'fairy-tale' doctrine of Indo-European proto-languages, 'an inadequate tool for any serious scholarly research.'[90] However, not all historical theses which were ostensibly grounded in law lived up to this expectation. Gobineau, for instance, viewed miscegenation as *the* great law of history and discoursed at length on 'les lois naturelles qui régissent la société'.[91] Firmin may have treated Comte as the anti-Gobineau: the evangelist of progress and improvement against the doom-laden prophecy of decay and collapse through miscegenation. But in reality these positions are hard to separate. As we shall see, Comte was for his part not exempt from certain essentialized views on race, and his theories required extensive modification by Firmin. All law-bound schemes held the potential to run roughshod over difference. In this section we will look at how our two thinkers modified the theories from which they drew inspiration, beginning with Firmin's reading of Comte.

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[89] Marr [1920], p. 90.
[90] Marr [1924]b, p. 12; Nikolaj Marr, 'On the Origin of Languages' [1925]c, trans. by Anna Kurkova, *Interventions: International Journal of Postcolonial Studies*, forthcoming, published online (2020) < https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/1369801X.2020.1813609> [Accessed 30 December 2021], 1-6 (p. 3).
[91] Dreher 1970, p. 63; Young 1995, p. 109; cf. Gobineau [1853-5], p. 141.

Despite Firmin's allegiance to Comte, the father of Positivism was in many respects not an ideal model for how to rehabilitate Afrodescendants as legitimate actors on the historical stage. As discussed previously, Comte argued that time was the only differentiating factor separating civilized and uncivilized races. He believed that 'altruist' sentiments would inevitably reveal humanity's true nature as 'un être concret dont les parties solidaires agissent, travaillent et progressent dans une destinée commune', as Firmin approvingly put it (ERH, 248). Insofar as Firmin understood racial equality to mean 'equality of potential', as Robert Bernasconi has argued, this conception was directly borrowed from Comte.[92] Comte's willingness to overlook racial difference as a barrier to the oneness of humanity has been lauded and contrasted favourably with the unabashed racism of Hegel.[93] Nonetheless, Comte was limited by his reductive view of the contribution to world civilization made by Africa, whether historically or potentially. Within the totality of human culture, Comte prescribed a narrowly defined role for Afrodescendnats. This is indicated by the way he mapped his epistemological framework onto his stadial account of history.

First articulated in his *Cours de philosophie positive* (1830-42), Comte advanced a theory which identified the cause of social evolution with changes in the way the human mind comprehends the world. 'Positivism' as a worldview corresponded to a specific stage of historical development and could only come about once 'the human mind gave up its quest to determine the first causes of phenomena and related facts by explanatory laws confirmed by taking observation.'[94] As the pinnacle of history, it is the successor to the 'theological' and 'metaphysical' stages. In these earlier stages, the principle of causality is assigned to deities or personified forces of nature. The first, theological stage is itself divided into fetishistic, polytheistic, and monotheistic sub-states, which form a necessary sequence through which all human societies must pass.[95] Yet, while treating these

[92] Bernasconi 2008, pp. 380-1. See also Camisha Russell, 'Positivism and Progress in Firmin's *Equality of the Human Races*', *Africology: The Journal of Pan African Studies* 7.2 (2014), 45-67 (p. 53).
[93] 'À l'ostracisme de l'Esprit hégélien, correspond l'action constitutive de l'esprit positif essentiellement intégrateur.' Angèle Kremer-Marietti, *Entre le signe et l'histoire: l'anthropologie positiviste d'Auguste Comte* (Paris: Kliencksieck, 1982), p. 134. Cf. also Bernasconi 2008, p. 382.
[94] Mary Pickering, 'Auguste Comte and the Return to Primitivism', *Revue internationale de philosophie* 52.203 (1998), 51-77 (p. 53).
[95] Schmaus 1982, p. 261.

stages of epistemological development in temporal sequence, Comte also mapped them onto a racialized geography. Adhering to the familiar tripartite division of humanity, Comte identified the 'white race' with speculative monotheism, the 'yellow race' with active polytheism, and the 'black race' with affective fetishism.[96] Comte praised fetishism as lacking some of the fallacies of monotheism and viewed its incorporation into the future harmonious fusion as essential.[97] However, he never saw Africa as having departed from this most primitive stage of development and thus it remained outside of history.[98]

Taken in its entirety, Comte's theory served some but not all of Firmin's argumentative aims. The realization of positivism as the culmination of the world-historical process required the integration of all humanity's disparate parts and thus contradicted the idea of a 'concurrence vitale.' At the conclusion of *De l'Égalité*, Firmin presents a vision of future world harmony which reprises many of the key motifs of the *Cours de philosophie positive*:

> Les races, se reconnaissant égales, pourront se respecter et s'aimer. En effet, leurs aptitudes sont généralement les mêmes; mais chacune d'elles trouvera dans son milieu un stimulant spécial pour la production spontanée de certaines qualités exquises du cœur, de l'esprit ou du corps. Cela suffira pour qu'elles aient toujours besoin de se compléter […]. (ERH, 659)

Much like Comte, Firmin associated the mindset of future harmony with a reincorporation of affect and emotion which hitherto had been side-lined in favour of the intellect.[99] However, in suggesting that each race retain a separate place in its own 'milieu', Firmin introduces a limit on global integration not found in Comte.[100] Races are also accorded the autonomy of progressing under their own impetus. These nuances introduced by Firmin can be related to his interest in proving that

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[96] Pickering 1998, p. 68; Bernasconi 2008, p. 378.

[97] Such was the importance of fetishism that, in Comte's view, 'the highest stage of civilization was in effect a return to the beginning.' Pickering 1998, p. 57.

[98] 'Comte's vision was in fact largely limited to the white race, and his conception of civilization, though in principle universally human, was in practice Europocentric.' Stocking 1987, p. 29.

[99] Pickering 1998, p. 57.

[100] Comte imagined that the end of history would bring about the end of racial difference: 'Comte maintained that the 'organic distinctions' between the races would disappear under positivism not only because of the changing milieu and their cooperation in honor of Humanity but because of 'worthy marriages.'' Pickering 1998, p. 71. Quoting Auguste Comte, *Catéchisme positiviste, ou Sommaire exposition de la religion universelle en treize entretiens systématiques entre une femme et un prêtre de l'humanité* [1852] (Paris: Garnier-Flammarion, 1966), p. 257.

Africans had achieved a state of civilization independently of Europe and how this claim potentially contradicted Comte's unilinear stadial model. Firmin argued that the 'infériorité actuelle des Africains' belied the continent's once glorious civilization (ERH, 425). Africa, in his wholly negative and highly stereotyped view, existed in a state of 'profond avilissement' which, nonetheless, did not preclude an eventual regeneration (ERH, 424). Where Firmin departed from the Comtean doctrine of the universal potential for improvement was in arguing that Africa had at one point achieved a high degree of civilization but that this advancement was destroyed due to contingent historical factors. This claim was largely incompatible with positivism because of Comte's belief in the 'continuity' of historical progress and his acquiescence, albeit with certain reservations, to the view that Western civilization was the highest so far achieved in human history.[101] Firmin was hardly prepared to criticize Comte explicitly. Firmin did, however, note that 'evolutionary' theory would seem to dictate that 'un peuple parvenu à un certain degré de civilisation ne peut que monter toujours dans l'échelle de perfectionnement qu'il a commencé à gravir' (ERH, 429). His claim that evolution needed to accommodate 'des transformations régressives' (ERH, 429) indirectly challenges Comte's belief in the inevitability of improvement. In his section on Egypt, Firmin explores various un-positivist instances of civilization being thwarted.

In his discussion of Egypt and the African origins of its civilization, Firmin tempered evolutionism with an acknowledgement of retrograde processes not conforming to the ideal of growth and improvement:

> Mais il faut aussi se rappeler qu'à côté des influences qui entraînent une sélection progressive, il y en a d'autres qui mènent à des transformations régressives, tant au point de vue matériel qu'au point de vue moral. Alors, au lieu d'une évolution, il s'accomplit une révolution pénible; au lieu de marcher en avant, on rétrograde. (ERH, 429)

Firmin employed this concept of 'retrogression' as a way of explaining the disappearance of 'la haute civilisation' and thus that, notwithstanding the present-day 'backwardness' of their descendants, the builders of the pyramids belonged to

[101] Pickering 1998, pp. 62, 75.

'l'ancienne race nilotique ou nigritique' (ERH, 428).[102] This ancestral race, Firmin argued, was in every way superior when compared to 'l'état sauvage' in which its modern representatives in sub-Saharan Africa languished (ERH, 276). Firmin concurred with the 'considération empirique' made by anthropologists of Africans' 'ugliness' (ERH, 425). He argued, however, that just as a race's level of civilization is subject to the laws of progress, so too is the degree of its physical beauty. The ancient Egyptians embodied a 'type nigritique admirablement affiné' which reflected the salutary effects of social development on the base matter of physical race (ERH, 427-8). Firmin argued elsewhere that the same correlation applied to Europeans: 'il est incontestable que toutes les races subissent une évolution qui va de la laideur à la beauté', and despite France's high degree of civilization, Paris abounded in ugly human specimens serving as the exceptions that prove the rule when it comes to the efficacy of society's 'sélection artificielle' (ERH, 282, 284-5). He debunked the idealized myth of Caucasian beauty which were based on legends of the Ottoman sultan's harem: 'toutes les esclaves géorgiennes, albanaises ou circassiennes ne sont pas également belles. Ce sont les fleurs du panier qu'on choisit pour les plaisirs des sultans ou des pachas' (ERH, 285). In Firmin's stereotyped view of Africa, the 'formes grossières' exhibited by its modern inhabitants reflected a process of retrogression, a physiological corollary to the decline of civilization (ERH, 428). Neither of these phenomena reflected the timeless state of Afrodescendants but demonstrated that they were equally subject to the same laws of evolution as all other races. Yet by making progress vulnerable to decay and collapse, Firmin was invoking phenomena not accounted for within Comte's vision.

Firmin did not tackle this limitation of Comte's philosophy head-on as this would risk undermining the foundations of his critical enterprise. Instead, he covertly introduced elements of Hegelianism. Much like Comte, Hegel proposed a stadial and theological view of history but, unlike Comte, he did not think that all historical events conform to history's ideal pattern. Hegel incorporated downfall and collapse as an integral part of civilization; moreover, his conceptual duality between matter and spirit allowed for the possibility for a separate category of historical occurrences that do not contribute to the unfolding of spirit. As he wrote of Persia in the

[102] For the conventional use of terms such as 'Nilotic' in the anthropological discourse on Africa Pugach 2012, p. 4.

*Philosophy of History*, 'we must here banish from our minds the prejudice in favour of duration, as if it had any advantage as compared with transience.'[103] Hegel is curiously shielded from Firmin's otherwise unsparing critique of the racism of European thinkers. This is surprising given that Hegel's pronouncement that 'negroes are to be regarded as a race of children' who 'do not show an inherent striving for culture' and his assertion that 'it is in the Caucasian race that mind first attains to absolute unity with itself.'[104] In a short chapter of *De l'Égalité* entitled 'Préjugés et vanités', Firmin presents the reader with a collection of freestanding quotations from European writers, including both Kant and Gobineau, manifesting their unabashed racism. Rather than quoting directly from Hegel, Firmin instead cites a gloss of the *Philosophy of History* written by Hegel's French translator Augusto Véra.[105] This shows, if not a ringing endorsement of Hegel, at least an oddly attenuated critique. Hegel's argument that Spirit resides with a specific people at the historically decisive moment of its existence before departing, leaving them 'without rights', has justifiably been rejected as the expression of 'the immature European ego'.[106] Nonetheless, Hegel's differentiation between historical events which do and do not embody the unfolding of Spirit allowed room for the contingent. We may feel compelled to favour Comte's 'universalité homogène à laquelle chaque "race" participe complémentairement' over Hegel's belief in a 'dynamisme se déplaçant d'un "peuple" à l'autre'.[107] However, the presumption of an exceptionless, homogeneous universality was incompatible with Firmin's thesis that Africa had achieved civilization independently of Europe. While the emergence of Egyptian civilization evidenced the workings of progress (or, in Hegelian terms, the unfolding of Spirit), serving as an example to 'toutes les races arriérées' that they too can improve their lot, Firmin attributed its downfall to the kind of contingent events which stand outside of the teleological developmental plan:

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[103] G.W.F. Hegel, *The Philosophy of History* [1837], trans. by J. Sibree (New York: Dover, 1956), p. 221.
[104] Quoted in Robert Bernasconi and Tommy Lee Lott, *The Idea of Race* (Indianapolis and Cambridge: Hackett, 2000), pp. 39-42.
[105] The passage in question reads 'par là le nègre appartient au genre humain, l'esclavage est irrationnel et illégitime. Mais il ne suit nullement de la que la race nègre soit égale à la race blanche'. G.W.F. Hegel *Philosophie de l'esprit de Hegel* [1830], ed. Augusto Véra (Paris: Germer Baillière, 1867), p.122., quoted by Firmin, 1885 p. 480.
[106] Enrique Dussel, 'Eurocentrism and Modernity (Introduction to the Frankfurt Lectures)', *Boundary 2* 20.3 (1993), 65-76 (pp. 73-4).
[107] Kremer-Marietti 1982, p. 134.

> L'invasion des peoples moins avancés et d'une race étrangère ont enrayé et renversé la civilisation égyptienne, en contrariant l'essort [*sic*] du monde éthiopien vers un état de perfectionnement définitif. Dans la lutte pour l'existence, n'arrive-t-il pas aussi que des parasites ou bien des espèces étrangères, plus vivaces ou plus nombreuses, s'attaquent à une espèce ancienne, la dépriment, l'obligent à restreindre son développement organique, à revenir peu à peu aux formes antérieures, les moins accomplies, à subir enfin tous les effets d'une réversion inéluctable? (ERH, 429)

In the end, the introduction of non-teleological historical events, which was needed in order to argue that even races now deemed to be 'backwards' are capable of progress, led Firmin to adopt positions that were scarcely distinguishable from Gobineau.

Indeed, Marr made similar arguments to explain the destruction of Europe's ancient Japhetic world after the arrival of Indo-European 'barbarians.'[108] The Caucasus and its relations with neighbouring regions constituted a 'single cohesive world' which was possessed of its own cultural sophistication, internal self-regulation, and capacity for development.[109] Explaining its disappearance presented Marr with a difficulty comparable to Firmin's dilemma of accounting for the destruction of Africa's original advanced civilization. As Marr originally conceived it, the Japhetic theory recounted the loss of Japhetic civilization at the hands of a numerically superior Indo-European military power:

> Across the entire known cultural world of the time, from the Caucasus and Asia Minor to the Iberian Peninsula, one language was spoken, the language of the Japhetic family; not yet fully separated from the Semites, the two had begun to diverge. Although the unity of the Japhetic world may have sustained an earlier blow, the blow which finished it off—the coup de grâce—came in the form of the Indo-European invasion, after which mixture and hybridization ensued, along with the birth of new crossed linguistic forms, and mutual comprehension was lost.[110]

[108] Marr [1920], p. 121.
[109] Marr 1912, p. 71.
[110] Marr [1920]. P. 121.

As both Firmin and Marr demonstrate, attempts to describe history in terms of law-bound regularity often produced a surplus in the form of countervailing forces which could only be explained as the effects of historical contingency. As Marr's theories developed, he would come to abandon this duality of Japhetic and Indo-European worlds, along with the thesis that they collided violently, and would instead modify his scheme for global linguistic growth so as to accommodate these erstwhile opponents. The final iteration of his theory aspired to a state of 'remainderless' regularity.[111] To begin with, however, both he and Firmin were confronted with the same dilemma: how to adopt evolutionism given that the prevailing evolutionary theories marginalized their own countries.

Marr's engagement with the ontological status of developmental laws followed a comparable pattern to Firmin, but in reverse. Firmin's starting point was a ready-made developmental scheme which claimed to be universal in scope. Firmin intervened in this scheme by hollowing out space for difference in the form of parallel independent developmental trajectories. His synthesis took the form of claiming that all races are equally capable of developing (given the presence of favourable environmental conditions), that they do so independently of one another but in parallel fashion, tracing the same stages of upward movement. The role of retrograde developments within his scheme was designed to reconcile the thesis that all races are equally capable of developing with the 'empirical' observation of inequalities. Marr's point of departure was the recognition that the world's languages and cultures are thoroughly heterogeneous. His task was to make the existing scheme of linguistic laws sufficiently expansive to be able to encompass all this variety. His interest in marginal languages which were inadequately accommodated in the prevailing genealogical classifications placed him in the same ideological camp as a group of scholars who rejected Indo-European linguistics and its increasing confidence in the explanatory power of linguistic laws. These scholars, as we shall see, felt that the world's linguistic variety could never be adequately captured by the abstract and schematic principles which linguists were deploying to explain diachronic change. However, to claim that Marr was opposed to the formulation of

[111] I am borrowing this term from Pourciau's description of Schleicher's 'scientific' remaking of linguistics, purged of the trappings of Spirit: 'Life in its new materialist manifestation never progresses in any way beyond the constraints of its causal origins, and can therefore be remainderlessly equated with the laws that describe its permutations.' Pourciau 2017, p. 58.

linguistic laws is only to tell half the truth.[112] From its first inception, Marr's Japhetic theory was premised on the idea that he had identified a family of languages which exhibited *regular* patterns of correspondence with one another. As time went on, Marr only became more ambitious in his quest to develop a universal and law-bound theory of linguistic evolution which held for all places and all time periods.

From the outset, Marr argued that the Japhetic family of languages was governed by laws. The existence of laws underpinned his larger claim that the languages truly were related to one another and that they possessed an intrinsic capacity for development and the generation of new forms. The identification of patterns of regular correspondence and predictable change amongst related languages had been a major preoccupation of scholars working on the comparative study of Indo-European languages. Jacob Grimm was among the first scholars to identify a 'regular' pattern of change in Germanic consonants over time.[113] 'Grimm's law', as it later came to be known, was amended by subsequent scholars who sought to account for 'exceptional' phenomena which Grimm had not been able to accommodate.[114] While scholarly attention for the most part was devoted to the phonetic laws of Indo-European languages, others such as Ernest Renan attempted to do for Semitic languages what pioneers such as Franz Bopp had done for Indo-European; however, these attempts remained mired in the usual stereotypes *à la* Renan about Semitic conservatism and incapacity for high-level reasoning.[115]

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[112] Marr's adherence to the positivist principle of formulating hypotheses and testing them against empirical evidence shows that he upheld the principle of linguistic law. Cf. Sériot: 'sa "phonologie", si elle est bien évidemment inapplicable à quoi que ce soit, est une anthropologie philosophique rationaliste. Partant du postulat (indémontrable puisque, justement, postulat) qu'il y a un *ordre* dans la langue.' Patrick Sériot, 'L'alphabet analytique abkhaze de N. Marr: une pasigraphie génétique?', in *L'édification linguistique en URSS: thèmes et mythes* (Cahiers de l'ILSL, no. 35), ed. by Elena Simonato (Lausanne: Institut de linguistique et des sciences du langage, Université de Lausanne, 2013), pp. 9-28 (p. 11). For claim that Marr was an anti-positivist, see Vladimir Alpatov, 'Que peut apporter l'héritage de Marr?', in *Un paradigme perdu*, ed. by Sériot (2005), pp. 11-26 (p. 22). I argue, following Sériot (2013), that Marr followed the positivist method perfectly; his selection of facts was arbitrary and his hypotheses were chosen on an ad hoc basis, but this was hardly unusual for a positivist.

[113] Arens 1969, p. 202.

[114] Karl Verner famously demonstrated a 'second' Indo-European law which supplemented Grimm's law: 'His (Verner's) demonstration that the syllable upon which the accent fell at an early stage in Indo-European determines whether in subsequent developments in Germanic a consonant was to be voiced or unvoiced put aside in one fell swoop the notion of exceptions to regular sound developments.' Terence H. Wilbur, 'Introduction', in *The Lautgesetz-Controversy* (Amsterdam: Benjamins, 1977), pp. ix-xcv (pp. xxxii-xxxiii).

[115] Brandist 2015, p. 206.

Marr's Japhetic theory, with the 'fraternal' (bratskoe) relationship it established with the Semitic and Hamitic languages, was designed to challenge this unequal attribution of linguistic brilliance.[116] Above all it was meant to put the Caucasus on the map for having produced languages that kept pace 'with each epoch of the cultural history of mankind', notwithstanding their disappearance from view after the rise of Indo-European.[117] His adoption of the name 'Japhetic' underlined the connection to the Semitic languages. This went back to Marr's very first scholarly assertion, the one that defied his professor Tsagareli; namely, that 'the Georgian language is related in flesh and spirit [khortsielad da sulierad], i.e. in regards to its core stock of words and its grammatical structure, to the Semitic family of languages'.[118] Although Marr claimed that his use of the term 'Japhetic' was merely 'conditional', i.e. as a placeholder, it gave his theory an evocative cultural resonance, both on account of the obvious Biblical connection and because medieval chroniclers had traced the Georgians' descent to Japhet.[119] In his first systematic treatise comparing Japhetic languages (which now encompassed Georgian, Mingrelian, Svan, Elamic, and 'pre-Aryan Armenian), Marr identified a set of morphological parallels with Semitic languages.[120] These included consonantal roots, the use of prefixes and suffixes, 'clearly related' patterns of vowels for the formation of passive participles, and identical consonantal endings by case.[121] While deferring judgement on the relative antiquity of Japhetic and Semitic languages to one another, Marr stressed the existence of 'correspondences' and 'equivalents' and alluded to 'tendencies' which explained divergences between the two linguistic groups.[122] Marr deployed his system of phonetic equivalence alongside such semantic parallels as

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[116] Cf. Marr [1920], p. 86.
[117] Marr [1920], p. 101.
[118] Nikolaj Marr, 'Buneba da tviseba kartulis enisa (mtsire shenishvna)' [1888], in *Po ėtapam razvytija jafetičeskoj teorii* (Moscow and Leningrad: Naučno-issledovatel'skij institut ėtničeskikh i nacional'nykh kul'tur narodov vostoka SSSR, 1926), pp. 1-3 (p. 3).
[119] In the collection of texts known collectively as the *Kartlis Tskhovreba*, or 'Lives of Kartli', begins by deriving the descent of the 'Georgians', along with several other groups from the same father, prince Thargamos. This prince in turn is said to trace his ancestry back to Japhet. Leont'i Mroveli, 'The Lives of the Georgian Kings', trans. by Dmitri Gamq'relidze, in *Kartlis Tskhovreba: A History of Georgia*, ed. by Roin Met'reveli and Stephen Jones (Tbilisi: Artanuji, 2014), pp. 13-75 (p. 13). Slezkine draws attention, too, to the supposed conventionality of Marr's use of the name 'Japhet', noting Marr's scheme was 'remarkably similar to the standard medieval Georgian family tree.' Yuri Slezkine, 'N. Ia. Marr and the National Origins of Soviet Ethnogenetics', *Slavic Review*, 55.4 (1996), 826-862 (p. 835).
[120] Nikolaj Marr, 'Predvaritel'noe soobščenie o rodstve gruzinskogo jazyka s semitičeskimi' [1908], in *Izbrannye raboty*, I (1933), pp. 23-38 (p. 23).
[121] Thomas 1957, pp. 6-7, citing Marr [1908], pp. 24-5.
[122] Marr [1908], p. 27.

Arabic and Georgian words for 'sun'; *shams* and *mze* respectively.[123] This method gave a hint of the increasingly bold derivations he would undertake, in which he combined a battery of phonetic laws with an equally formidable repertoire of semantic laws governing the evolution of concepts over time. In one instance, the Hebrew word for 'hell' (she'ol), the Georgian verb 'to kill' (mo-k'la-vs), and the name of the Etruscan god 'Kalu' are all traced back to a hypothetical archetype *skal.[124] The appeal to laws, even if they were formulated in an ad hoc manner, proved to be a versatile means for Marr to explain parallels across vast temporal and geographical expanses within the ever-expanding Japhetic family and into adjacent families of languages. As a preliminary to attempt to classify Elamic, Marr produced an axiomatic statement on the effectiveness of laws to comprehend highly complex phenomena in abbreviated form:

> Vowel shifts [perekhody zvukovye] are indeed multifarious, and this is true not only within the confines of a single language or a single epoch, but across multiple Japhetic languages and multiple eras; given these possible causes of variation, we cannot help but marvel, conversely, at the simplicity and, one might even say, stereotyped nature [šablonnost'] of the scheme of phonetic correspondences [sootnošenij] which we can ascertain as existing between, on the one hand, different groups, languages, and their dialects and, on the other hand, each of these individually and the Semitic languages.

Marr stresses the patterned regularity of sound correspondences by comparing them metaphorically to pieces of moveable type (to a 'šablon', i.e. *chablon*). The reduction of complexity to a schematic form was central to Marr's efforts at reconstituting the Japhetic family in the absence of historical evidence, or even in defiance of the received understanding of Europe's original ethnic composition. Sound laws were intrinsic to language and therefore could be used to circumvent ethnographic evidence for the diffusion of languages through space. Understanding Marr's shifting attitudes to ethnographic evidence requires that we situate his work within the crosscurrents of scholarly debate over the causes of linguistic change.

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[123] Ibid, p. 27.

[124] Nikolaj Marr, 'Nazvanye ėtrusskogo boga smerti Kalu i terminy 'pisat'', 'pet'', 'čort'', 'poėt-slepec'', *Izvestija Rossijskoj Akademii Nauk* (1924)c, 183-94 (pp. 184-5). Marr's use of the asterisk to denote a hypothetical reconstructed form was a convention began by Schleicher. Cf. Koerner [1981]b, p. 216.

The course of the nineteenth century had seen an ever-increasing emphasis on the explanatory power of intrinsic linguistic laws over and above cultural and ethnographic factors, at least within the nascent discipline of linguistics.[125] The emancipation of linguists from other fields of enquiry challenged the embeddedness of language within culture asserted by the likes of Wilhelm von Humboldt, who correlated a language's worldview with the mentality of its speakers.[126] Language eventually came to be studied on its own terms and not, in the manner of Herder and Renan, as a reflection of specific cultural 'monads'; however, this change came about in stages.[127] August Schleicher's innovation of treating languages as organisms contributed to this development by claiming a separate, biological rather than cultural, governing principle of linguistic change and granting Linguistics the status of a natural science equipped with its own toolkit for studying the law-bound growth of language.[128] Schleicher argued that languages follow a typical life trajectory: their initial embryonic state already dictates the path of their subsequent development, which unfolds over the course of lifespan marked by stages of youth, maturity, and finally decay.[129] Schleicher granted greater autonomy to language as an object of study than earlier scholars because he insisted that the implacable linguistic laws alone explained change, which occurred beyond the volition of speakers.[130] However, subsequent scholars thought that Schleicher's formalism had not gone far enough and were quick to identify the indemonstrable, metaphysical aspects of his developmental model. The Neogrammarian movement, comprising a circle of Indo-European scholars centred on the University of Leipzig in the 1870s-80s, polemically rejected Schleicher's attribution of a biological life cycle to language. In place of decay, they argued for 'the notion of constant and normatively neutral

[125] For the constitution of linguistics as a *science* in its own right and Schleicher's role in this, see Koerner [1981]b, pp. 214-5 and Benes 2008, pp. 233-4.
[126] Greenberg 1974, p. 38.
[127] I am borrowing a term used by Anthony Grafton, writing that 'Herder and Renan insisted that each culture had a particular nature, as independent of all others as a Leibnizian monad.' Anthony Grafton, *Worlds Made of Words: Scholarship and Community in the Modern West* (Cambridge, MA and London: Harvard University Press, 2009), p. 184.
[128] Greenberg 1974, p. 39; Koerner [1981]b, pp. 214-5.
[129] See Olga Amsterdamska, *Schools of Thought: The Development of Linguistics from Bopp to Saussure* (Dordrecht and Lancaster: Reidel, 1987), pp. 181-2. For Schleicher, explaining a language's development meant examining its origins: 'to reconstruct the forms which are regarded as the original or primitive Indo-European forms is really the shortest method of indicating later changes in the individual languages.' Holger Pedersen, *Linguistic Science in the Nineteenth Century: Methods and Results*, trans. by John Webster Spargo (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1931), p. 267
[130] Wilbur 1977, p. xxxviii, Benes 2008, pp. 232-3.

change affecting all languages at every stage of their development'.[131] Linguistic change could be explained through several constantly occurring processes, but the central mechanism identified by Neogrammarians was the action of sound laws. Although easily misrepresented, their central thesis as summarized in the slogan 'the sound laws admit of no exceptions', held that diachronic change follows a regular pattern, and that for any description of change to be scientifically valid it must identify a principle which affects all members of a given class of phenomena.[132]

Although the Neogrammarians' formalism did a lot to invalidate ethnographic and cultural determinism in linguistics, their movement inspired a reaction which rejected their sound laws and sought a return to extra-linguistic forms of causality. The Austrian Romance philologist Hugo Schuchardt was an early and highly influential opponent of Neogrammarian theory.[133] In an essay of 1885 Schuchardt pointed out the circular reasoning which sustained the Neogrammarians' use of supposedly objective laws. Although they set a high threshold of proof by insisting that any law must hold without exception, they qualified this by saying that it must do so within a given 'dialect', an ill-defined concept which allowed them a lot of leeway. It left them free to selectively demarcate a field in which the laws held true ('eine wirkliche Einheitlichkeit […], innerhalb deren die Ausnahmslosigkeit der Lautgesetze gelte').[134] The same arbitrariness applied to their definition of temporal limits.[135] Even more glaring was the Neogrammarians' treatment of language mixture. Phenomena which deviated drastically from the law could simply be attributed to the 'exceptional' occurrence of ethnic mixture and the resulting disruption to the dominant language's phonetic structure.[136] The inconsistencies of the Neogrammarians' application of law, which in Schuchardt's view derived from their mistaken sense that languages are homogeneous and internally consistent across

[131] Amsterdamska 1987, p. 182. For a chronology of the movement and potted biographies of its main members, see Wilbur 1977, pp. xxvi-xxxvi.
[132] Wilbur 1977, p. xxxvi.
[133] For biographical details on Schuchardt, who maintained a network of correspondence stretching the globe but famously never left Graz, see Terence H. Wilbur, 'Hugo Schuchardt and the Neogrammarians', in Hugo Schuchardt, Theo Vennemann, and Terence H. Wilbur, *Schuchardt, the Neogrammarians, and the Transformational Theory of Phonological Change* (Frankfurt/Main: Athenäum, 1972), pp. 75-113 (p. 79).
[134] Hugo Schuchardt, 'Über die Lautgesetze. Gegen die Junggrammatiker' [1885], in *Schuchardt-Brevier: Ein Vademecum der allgemeinen Sprachwissenschaft*, ed. by Leo Spitzer (Halle [Saale]: Niemeyer, 1928), pp. 51-107 (p. 59).
[135] Ibid, pp. 66-7.
[136] Ibid, pp. 64-5.

time, vindicated his own area of expertise. Steeped in the multilingualism of the Austro-Hungarian Empire, where German, Italian, and Slavic languages constantly abutted and overlapped with one another, Schuchardt introduced a new awareness of language contact which he saw as constant and endemic.[137] Another important challenge to the status of linguistic laws came from Schuchardt's fellow Romance linguist Graziadio Isaia Ascoli. Ascoli hypothesized that Latin had given way to the many Romance dialects found on the Apennine Peninsula because the Roman Empire had overlayed its language on a variegated ethnic 'substrate' whose disparate linguistic habits found expression in the eventual fracturing of Latin unity.[138] Schuchardt and Ascoli were both sophisticated thinkers, but their ideas were often crudely deployed by scholars following in their wake. Substrate influence came to be understood as functioning through the physiological difference of ethnic groups and their respective articulatory capacities.[139] Emboldened by the failure of intrinsic sound laws to explain language change, a raft of writers approached the linguistic patchwork of Eurasia with an eye to uncovering ancient and prehistoric ethnic contacts. They traced the linguistic record migrations, conquests, clashes, and subjugations occurring between races and ethnicities, each of which was viewed as homogeneous.[140] Substrate linguistics transposed into language what Gobineau had

[137] Cf. P. Sture Ureland, 'Some Contact Structures in Scandinavian, Dutch, and Raeto-Romansch: Inner-Linguistic and/or Contact Causes of Language Change', in *Language Change: Contributions to the Study of its Causes*, ed. by Leiv Egil Breivik and Ernst Håkon Jahr (Berlin and New York: Mouton, 1989), pp. 239-76 (pp. 244-5).

[138] Arens 1969, pp. 370-3.

[139] In the nineteen-thirties, Ascoli's concept of the 'sostrato etnico', used to describe a community of people speaking an indigenous language, was given a new inflection and developed into a theory of inherited physiological traits embodied in different 'base di articolazione.' Giuseppe Francescato, 'Sostrato, contatto linguistico e apprendimento della lingua materna', *Archivio glottologico italiano* LV (1970), 10-28 (pp. 12-3).

[140] A catalogue could be made of the instances of ethnic struggle which writers of the period imagined to have detected through the linguistic evidence. Common motifs in these accounts include the image of a vertical superposition of the language of the conqueror (the 'ins Land eindringende' Volk) atop the language of the conquered indigenes (alteinheimische). Ernst Lewy, 'Zur Frage der Sprachmischung', in *Beiträge zur Sprach- und Völkerkunde: Festschrift für den geheimen Regierungsrat Dr. phil. Alfred Hillebrandt* (Halle: Waisenhaus, 1913), pp. 110-20 (p. 113). Even if the conqueror was numerically inferior and ruled the over the conquered as a small elite, acculturation could still occur from below: 'denn die einwandernden arischen Völker brauchen nicht von allem Anfang in so zahlreicher Menge gekommen sein, dass sie die gesamte Urbevölkerung ausrotteten; sondern sie werden sich, ähnlich wie dies in Mitani der Fall war, als Herrenschichte über die anderen gelagert und diesen ihre eigenen Kultur aufgedrungen haben.' Reinhold von Lichtenberg, *Die Ägäische Kultur* (Leipzig: Quelle und Meyer, 1911), p. 140.

written about racial bloodlines: namely, that conquest and miscegenation lead to 'une modification sensible dans la constitution du sang des maîtres.'[141]

Having traced these debates surrounding the use of ethnographic evidence in linguistics, it is possible to situate Marr. There are certain indications which would lead us to assign him straightforwardly to the substrate camp which opposed the Neogrammarians. In the preface to the second, German-language edition of his *Japhetic Caucasus*, Marr went on the attack against Indo-European linguistics and declared that 'Kreuzung ist nicht Anomalie, sondern ein normaler Hergang, welcher die Entstehung der Arten und sogar die der sog. genetischen Verwandtschaft erklärt.'[142] This very categorical statement about the centrality of mixture may likely be an allusion to Schuchardt. Marr's parenthetical reference to genetic relationships underlines his rejection of protolanguages and his belief that linguistic relationships are not set in stone but instead result from 'einer schöpferischen Tätigkeit menschlicher Gemeinschaften.'[143] A seemingly unambiguous antipathy towards the Neogrammarians would be Marr's dispute with Heinrich Hübschmann, whom he met in Strasbourg in 1894. Hübschmann was affiliated with the Neogrammarians, having applied the principle of sound laws to Armenian, identifying the language as part of an independent branch of Indo-European.[144] Marr's disdain for Hübschmann's methods, dismissing his expertise in Armenian as 'hübschmannarmenisch', evidences a distrust for merely theoretical approaches to languages by scholars lacking first-hand knowledge of their cultural setting.[145] However, it does not follow from this that Marr rejected the idea of linguistic laws out of hand or that he imagined extra-linguistic factors such as ethnography to cause linguistic change in a mechanistic manner.

Marr's *Japhetic Caucasus* directly addressed substrate research, and it was in this context that the work was received.[146] The work was, as its full title indicated, in

[141] Gobineau [1853-5], p. 168. Quoted by Young 1995, p. 104.
[142] Nikolaus [Nikolaj] Marr, *Der japhetitische Kaukasus und das dritte ethnische Element im Bildungsprozess der mittelländischen Kultur* (Berlin, Stuttgart, Leipzig: Kohlhammer, 1923a), p. 11.
[143] Ibid, p. 11.
[144] Wilbur 1977, p. xxxi.
[145] Thomas 1957, p. 4.
[146] Marr's Austrian supporter Robert Bleichsteiner situated Marr's work thus far in the context of the preceding decades, beginning with the apprehension that there were elements within Greek that suggested borrowings from an older unrelated language. Bleichsteiner accorded pride of place to Marr as the first scholar to bring to bear a sufficiently wide range of experience, including the languages of the Caucasus, to grasp the full implications of all these separate intimations of a hidden truth, and

part addressed at the 'ethnic' composition of ancient Mediterranean culture. It trumpeted discoveries which were consistent with the methodological approach of attributing exceptional features within classical languages to hitherto unknown ethno-linguistic substrates identified with such shadowy ancient peoples as the Etruscans and Pelasgians.[147] Indeed, Marr applauded the fact that scholars had come to recognize the probable existence 'as a borrowing within Greek and Latin' of words stemming from 'an unknown language of Asia Minor'.[148] Marr claimed to have confirmed the existence of borrowings in the classical languages, via the 'merging' of the Greeks and Romans with the earlier inhabitants of the Mediterranean, but also asserted that his discovery went beyond what other scholars had claimed by showing that the borrowed elements 'saturated' Latin and Greek and exerted a morphological and 'psychological' influence on their later development.[149] Although he argued that the work transcended the substrate model, Marr's *Japhetic Caucasus* was compatible with the longstanding search for an ethnic attribution to the 'puzzling' elements within the classical languages.[150]

Nonetheless, the *Japhetic Caucasus* was not consistent in the way it treated the relationship between ethnicity and language, nor did it represent Marr's final statement on the subject. In many respects the work did conform to the premises of substrate research. Where the text went beyond the ethnocentric approach of substrate research was in treating the Japhetic 'element' as a multilingual web stretching from the Pyrenees to the Pamirs; in other words, as a cohesive linguistic system in its own right rather than a set of random disturbances to Indo-European wrought by ethnographic contact.[151] The vastness of the Japhetic world transcended its merely expedient function in explaining exceptions to the pattern of Indo-European development.[152] Within just a few years of the *Japhetic Caucasus*, Marr

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thereby to solve the 'ethnic problem' of European pre-history. Robert Bleichsteiner, 'Die Subaräer des alten Orients im Lichte der Japhetitenforschung', in *Festschrift: Publication d'hommage offert au P.W. Schmidt*, ed. by Wilhelm Koppers (Vienna: Mechitaristen, 1928), pp. 1-19 (pp. 1-2).

[147] Cf. Arens 1969, pp. 473-4.

[148] Marr [1920], p. 81.

[149] Ibid, p. 81.

[150] Elements which, in the words of Pott, 'ihrer räthselhaften Natur wegen etwas Fremdartiges zu haben scheinen'. August Friedrich Pott, *Die Personennamen, insbesondere die Familiennamen und ihre Entstehungsarten: auch unter Berücksichtigung der Ortsnamen* (Leipzig: Brockhaus, 1853), p. 451.

[151] Marr [1920], p. 113.

[152] When Holger Pedersen wrote that 'in the distance beckons the hope that the study of Caucasia may cast some light on the Babel of tongues spoken in ancient times in Asia Minor and its vicinity, a

was busy abolishing the duality between Indo-European and Japhetic languages which had structured his earlier work. This change in his thinking is indicated by a brief notice in which Marr revises the status of languages which he had earlier treated as the product of this union:

> More obvious hybrids, such as, for example, the varieties of Armenian or, to a certain extent, the Albanian language, are not the embodiment [voploščenie] of a later crossing between Indo-European with Japhetic languages, but are representatives of a transitional state at an intermediary stage between pure Japhetic and consummate [soveršenimi] Indo-European languages.[153]

The 'consummate' nature of Indo-European with regards to Japhetic signals what was at work: where previously he had treated Japhetic and Indo-European as unrelated families, separated by genetic difference, Marr was now situating them as subsequent stages in a single evolutionary trajectory. Henceforth, Marr regarded Indo-European as an *in situ* typological transformation following on from an earlier Japhetic *stage* of language. This stadialism was the core of what became the theory of 'glottogonia', Marr's global evolutionary scheme for explaining the typological, rather than genetic, classification of all languages of the world.[154] In the end, Marr's predilection for laws and regularity, a preference close in spirit to the Neogrammarians, gained the upper hand in his thinking, leading him to articulate a theory which both celebrated linguistic variety and subsumed difference within a single underlying unity.

Firmin and Marr both attempted to balance the demands of difference and universality by couching variety within a fundamental unity. Marr's glottogonic process was a relatively late articulation of the position Firmin had adopted in *De l'Égalité*; namely, the formulation of a universal, teleological account of development, accounting for the emergence of complex forms, which did not posit a single privileged variety winning out over all the others. Language was Marr's

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linguistic world of which we have at present only very incomplete knowledge through ancient inscriptions', he probably did not have in mind as sweeping a scheme as Marr was proposing. Pedersen 1931, p. 116.

[153] Nikolaj Marr, 'Indoevropejskie jazyki Sredizemnomor'ja' [1924]a, in *Izbrannye raboty*, II (1936), pp. 185-6 (p. 185). Stated in full, Marr's assertion is that these languages stand 'meždu čystimi jafetičeskimi i soveršenimi indoevropejskimi jazykami' (185).

[154] Cf. Marr [1925]a, pp. 209-10.

central concern, whereas for Firmin it played merely a subordinate role in articulating his thesis of racial equality. Nonetheless, there are moments in *De l'Égalité* which directly address some of the topics discussed previously in the context of the Neogrammarians. Firmin subjects the history of linguistics as a discipline to the same scrutiny he applied to other branches of science. In the process, he shows his familiarity with the key figures in the emergence of Indo-European comparativism, such as Jacob Grimm and Franz Bopp, and with the central concept of the 'lois phonétiques' (ERH, 181-2). Firmin is above all concerned with one question and the numerous hasty answers offered to it by scholars: whether 'les races humaines, en créant chacune leur langue, conformément à leurs instincts et suivant leur constitution organique, ne laisseraient point deviner, dans la contexture idiomatique de ces diverses langues, des traces positives qui les distinguent les unes des autres' (ERH, 185). He surveys numerous attempts to correlate language and race, including Armand de Quatrefages' identification of racial markers in phonetics as dictated by 'la construction des organes buccaux' to Wilhelm von Humboldt's intimation of 'un rapport si intime entre la race et la langue, que les générations ne s'accoutumeraient que difficilement à bien prononcer les mots que ne savaient pas leurs ancêtres' (ERH, 187). Having surveyed the prevailing theories, Firmin adopts positions of his own which are remarkably close to Marr. Firmin denies the existence of an Indo-European proto-language, instead regarding linguistic commonalities between seemingly related languages as 'l'expression sociale des peuples qui s'en servent' reflecting the 'degré de civilisation de ces peuples' (ERH, 192). In addition, Firmin addresses the question of interethnic contacts and concludes that these do not have a bearing on language. He cites historical anecdotes of migratory groups becoming assimilated to new languages before turning to examples closer to home.[155] 'La République haïtienne, peuplée de descendants d'Africains, ne parle-t-elle pas le français,' he asks rhetorically (ERH, 194). Firmin follows this with a more directly performative act of linguistic mastery:

> Mais en m'exprimant ici dans une langue dont mes ancêtres de Dahomey n'avaient absolument nulle idée, ai-je besoin d'offrir un exemple plus

[155] Firmin's examples (including the account of Sultan Selim I's Bosniak troops who stayed behind in Nubia after the end of a military campaign, settle and ultimately renounce their native language) originate in Theodor Waitz, *Anthropologie der Naturvölker* (Friedirch Fleischer: Leipzig, 1859), pp. 285-287.

> éloquent de la nullité des rapports naturels qu'on a essayé d'établir entre le langage et la race? (ERH, 195)

Firmin's disregard for Kreyòl and his presentation of Haiti as homogeneously francophone represent shortcomings in his work. It also indicates a striking divergence from Marr given how prevalent Marr treated the existence of linguistic mixture. Nonetheless, Firmin's position is understandable from the point of view that he, like Marr, did not think language and race coincided, whereas the prevailing accounts of linguistic creoles and pidgins were reductively ethnocentric.[156]

However, the similarities between Firmin and Marr when it comes to evolutionary law are to be found not so much in those instances where they directly address the same topics, but at a deeper level within their respective philosophical systems. They argued that the transition between subsequent stages of evolution occurs everywhere according to the same pattern. This applies to Firmin's view of the progress of civilization, which he detached from race, and Marr's theory of the spontaneous generation of analogous linguistic forms according to the glottogonic process. Comparisons across time and space are admissible for both our thinkers because they saw evolution as governed by a pre-existing universal law, a common 'unité de plan' (ERH, 116) applicable to all peoples. The evolutionary schemes proposed by Firmin and Marr admitted greater plurality than was typical in the dominant scholarly accounts. Our understanding of their interventions into the discourse of the time can be enhanced if we turn to their treatment of evolutionary origins.

## 1.4 Origins

By asserting the existence of universally applicable evolutionary laws, Firmin and Marr were able to describe the emergence of analogous phenomena of human creation, whether civilizations or languages, as arising at multiple points independently of one another. Accordingly, similarity of form did not necessarily imply common origin. The possibility for multiple points of origin offered an

[156] Cf. Angela Bartens, *Der kreolische Raum: Geschichte und Gegenwart* (Helsinki: Suomalainen Tiedeakatemia, 1996), p. 68.

alternative to the prevailing evolutionary model, culturally enshrined in the Bible, which was based on the idea of a unity of origin followed by divergent and unequal strands of development. In their own ways, Firmin and Marr sought an alternative to the Darwinian-Schleicherian model of the single tree of descent with radiating branches. In its place, they offered *a forest of trees*.[157]

The expression 'a forest of trees' was coined by Armand de Quatrefages, the biologist and Société d'anthropologie member, to characterize the work of recent polygenists:

> À l'*arbre de la vie*, admis par Darwin, arbre unique et représentant à lui seul tout le passé, tout le présent et même, jusqu'à un certain point, l'avenir de la création organisée, Vogt et M. Gaudry substituent tout au moins un bosquet, peut-être une forêt composée d'arbres différents, dont il reste à déterminer le nombre et les essences.[158]

Quatrefages describes the two contemporary anatomists, Carl Vogt and Albert Gaudry, as rejecting the doctrine of a single ancestor for the animal kingdom and positing instead the separate existence of numerous 'séries de familles, en nombre indéterminé, distinctes et isolées les unes des autres depuis l'origine des choses.'[159] The possibilities opened up by polygenesis for the existence of multiple lines of descent gives an indication of its covert influence on our two thinkers. Quatrefages' remarks could also be applied to Paul Broca, the founder of the Société d'anthropologie and a figure for whom Firmin had a perhaps surprising degree of sympathy.[160] Indeed, Firmin confesses that he lacks any 'prédilection pour la doctrine unitaire telle que ses adeptes la soutiennent, et que la doctrine polygéniste ne me cause aucune répugnance' (ERH, 48). He prepared to weigh the merits of both schools of thought. Firmin's receptiveness to polygenesis is surprising insofar as its basic tenet, that different races constitute separate species, was used as a justification

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[157] For the origin of this phrase, see Joy Harvey, 'Evolutionism Transformed: Positivists and Materialists in the *Société d'anthropologie de Paris* from Second Empire to Third Republic', in *The Wider Domain of Evolutionary Thought*, ed. by D. Olroyd and I. Langham (Dordrecht, Boston, Leiden: Reidel, 1983), pp. 289-310 (p. 289).
[158] Armand de Quatrefages, *Les Émules de Darwin*, 2 vols (Paris: Alcan, 1894), ii, p. 22. Also referred to in Harvey 1983, p. 306, f. 2.
[159] Quatrefages 1894, ii, p. 22. For discussions of Vogt and Gaudry, see, respectively, Young 1995, pp. 17-19 and Peter J. Bowler, *The Eclipse of Darwinism: Anti-Darwinian Evolution Theories in the Decades around 1900* (Baltimore and London: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1983)
[160] Wartelle 2014, p. 126.

for the enslavement of Afrodescendants on the basis that they could be excluded biologically from humanity.[161] However, the connection is less surprising if we consider Broca's political positions, namely his republicanism, his rejection—as a pseudo-aristocratic affectation—of the bourgeois preoccupation with blood lines and natural hierarchies, and his belief that physiological improvements coincided with the growth of civilization.[162] Although Broca was the chief author of many of the anthropometric tables dissected in *De l'Égalité*, Firmin viewed him in a more sympathetic light, on account of his honesty in disclosing his scientific method, than Gobineau, whose prejudices were not amenable to reasoning and who 'réunissait à une grande érudition une faiblesse de conception et un manque de logique avérés' (ERH, 203). To be sure, Firmin was not sparing in his criticism of Broca, especially when it came to Broca's thesis that the offspring of hybrids progressively become infertile (ERH, 94-101).[163] However, it would be wrong to say that Firmin's 'officious obsequiousness' towards Broca (whom he addressed as 'l'illustre Broca' [ERH, 49]) was *solely* a rhetorical gesture reflective of the precarious position of a black Haitian within the Société d'anthropologie.[164] Broca, who had died several years before Firmin's arrival in Paris, is quoted approvingly in *De l'Égalité* for his differentiation between natural and social evolution ('la civilisation, dit-il, admet donc "au banquet de la vie" une nombreuse catégorie d'individus que la nature brutale en aurait exclus.' [ERH, 421]).[165] Furthermore, Broca set a precedent for the use of science to banish theological prejudice which appealed to Firmin. Broca has the merit in Firmin's eyes of abandoning the Biblical account of human origin. His anticlericalism meant that he was not tempted to adduce the Biblical curse of Ham as evidence for African inferiority. As Firmin notes, a view of monogenesis inspired by the Biblical account of the sons of Noah had been used as a justification for slavery (ERH, 206). Indeed, Firmin relatively early on in his book defended French polygenists for seeking 'l'indépendance de la science et son affranchissement de toute subordination aux idées religieuses' whereas their American counterparts used the theory to justify slavery (ERH, 50-1). Firmin's engagement with polygenesis was

[161] Cf. Young 1995, p. 9.
[162] Francis Schiller, *Paul Broca: Founder of French Anthropology, Explorer of the Brain* (Berkeley, Los Angeles, London: University of California Press, 1979), pp. 149-51, 280-2.
[163] For a discussion of Broca's thesis on the infertility of hybrids, see Young 1995, p. 13-4.
[164] Miller 2021, p. 32.
[165] Quoting Paul Broca, 'Mémoires sur l'hybridité' [1858-9], in *Mémoires d'anthropologie*, 5 vols (Paris: Reinwald, 1871-81), III (1877), pp. 321-616 (p. 244).

too profound to be dismissed as an act of deference to a deceased scholar whose prominence, as we shall see, was in decline by the time Firmin arrived in Paris. Firmin engaged in a reasoned critique of Broca's work which resulted in a unique synthesis between the basic tenets of monogenesis and 'l'origine autochthone des grandes races humaines' (ERH, 121).

In approaching the mono- versus polygenesis debate, Firmin draws heavily on his reading of Broca's seminal 'Mémoires sur l'hybridité' (1858-9). Broca is likely the single most important author in *De l'Égalité* going by the frequency and length with which Firmin cites him and the fact that other authors referred to by Firmin can be traced back to his reading of Broca.[166] Broca was also a stylistic model for Firmin's book. The rhetorical bombast and accusatory tone of *De l'Égalité* has echoes in passages from Broca's work, such as the French anatomist's castigation of the monogenists for having 'l'esprit aveuglé par un système, opprimé par une idée préconçue qui a ses racines dans des croyances presque universelles et dont il est difficile de secouer le joug'.[167] In keeping with Broca's rejection of Biblical myth, Firmin begins his assessment of monogenesis by distinguishing between 'la doctrine unitaire et le monogénisme.' The former is 'une déduction toute scientifique', the latter merely a theological hangover 'dont toute l'autorité repose sur une croyance religieuse' (ERH, 115). What is at stake in this distinction is whether one believes that humanity is descended from a single Edenic couple. The 'unitary' theory in Firmin's terms is a secular version of monogenesis which accepts the unity of the human species without positing descent from a single couple. In strictly etymological terms, Firmin argues, the unitary theory *is* polygenetic because it holds that 'tous les hommes ne tirent pas leur origine d'un seul père, ou d'un seul point de la terre, comme nous l'affirme la tradition biblique' (ERH, 116). This is not an endorsement of polygenesis in the conventional sense of the word: Firmin is not arguing that separate human bloodlines (i.e. races) represent separate species. However, his unitary theory opposed the version of monogenesis adopted by writers such as the physician James Cowles Prichard, who sought confirmation in biology

[166] E.g. the German anthropologist Theodor Waitz, source of the linguistic anecdotes referred to above, p. 79, who occurs in Broca [1858-9], pp. 529-37.
[167] Ibid, p. 365.

for the Biblical tale of human origins from a single couple.[168] The origin was the linchpin of Prichard's view of human history because tracing the derivation of human varieties back to a common starting point allowed him to explain cultural and racial difference as a secondary development occurring over the course of man's outward diffusion from Eden.[169] Firmin saw no redeeming features in the Biblical tale and thoroughly rejected the scientific notion of single-origin ancestry: belief in 'l'unité d'origine, *adamique* ou non' inevitably fostered inequality because, as with the curse of Ham, it associated whiteness with purity and divinity (ERH, 115, 604 f. 1).[170] Broca's polygenesis offered an appealing alternative because it did classify races according to their proximity to a single archetype. Thus, Firmin approves of Broca's view that 'chaque race d'hommes a pris naissance dans une région déterminée' and that 'la différence d'origine n'implique nullement l'idée de la subordination des races', but qualifies this with his own statement that 'la différence d'origine n'implique nullement des différences spécifiques parmi les races humaines' (ERH, 116).[171] The qualification negates Broca's thesis that races constitute separate species, which he had hoped to establish on the basis of the progressively reduced fertility of hybrids. The endorsement of separate origins—and the belief in equality which Broca, perhaps surprisingly, affirmed—signals a more radical rupture with the evolutionism of the time and its guiding principle of the genealogical tree.

Firmin presents his own synthesis of the unitary theory and polygenesis which can be summarized by the principle that 'il n'y a qu'une seule *espèce* humaine' but that it emerged 'sur plusieurs points de globe' and always exhibited the same 'unité de plan' (ERH, 115-6). The thesis of the separate emergence of the same species is derived from a view of the earth's geology as composed of repeating patterns: 'la terre offre dans toutes les régions une structure variée; les parties similaires sont répandues çà et là, par îlots plus ou moins espacés' (ERH, 117). From this observation about geology Firmin proposes a general principle for the formation of life-forms on the planet, which is that 'elle a eu partout le même genre d'activité

[168] Daniel N. Livingstone, *Adam's Ancestors: Race, Religion, and the Politics of Human Origins* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2011), p. 119; Young 1995, p. 48.
[169] Stocking 1987, p. 51.
[170] Cf. Schiller on Broca's rejection of 'the one-ancestor doctrine with its implication that mixture meant decay and slavery'. Schiller 1979, p. 139.
[171] Quoting Broca [1858-9], p. 566.

et a produit partout des résultats semblables' (ERH, 118). This same principle can be applied to emergence of species. Typically for the time, Firmin defines species as a group of organisms capable of producing fertile offspring; however, he argues that identity of species, so defined, does not have anything to say about the origins, singular or multiple, of the lineages it contains.[172] Evolution, he argues, 'se réalisant en même temps ou successivement, sur des points multiples du globe, a pu produire chaque espèce avec une forme généralement semblable' (ERH, 118). The morphological principles governing life on earth allow the possibility of the emergence of species at multiple points of the globe. Firmin reasons that the earth had more zones that were climatologically equivalent at the point that the human species arose, but that this initial 'uniformité de température' was disrupted by a series of 'cataclysmes' (ERH, 120). These new circumstances placed uneven pressures on the different constituents of the species and pitted the principle of 'hérédité', which tended to maintain 'la physionomie générale et primitive de l'espèce' against the principle of adaptation (ERH, 119). The latter eventually gained the upper hand and established 'une nouvelle hérédité' accounting for the different 'variétés' of man contained within the same species (ERH, 119-20). Firmin uses planetary catastrophism to account for the emergence of the 'grandes races humaines' (ERH, 121). As he argued elsewhere, traits acquired as the result of climatic adaptation are not permanent but can be reversed if a population moves to a different locale (ERH, 73). Firmin's theory contradicts the monogenetic view that races share a common ancestor and origin point and arose out of the splitting up of the single original evolutionary trunk—with differences only becoming more pronounced over time.[173] Firmin's synthesis of the competing views of human speciation could be described as a deconstruction of mono- and polygenesis: monogenesis is discredited in his eyes because its adherents reject *a priori* the idea that different races could emerge from separate parts of the globe; however, polygenesis, in arguing that races are separate species because they descend from separate ancestors, merely recapitulates the monogenetic definition of species as

[172] For the emerging scientific consensus on species and fertility in the nineteenth century, see Young 1995, pp. 6-16.
[173] 'Anti-Darwinian' thought in multiple fields rejected this unidirectionality of evolution and its ruling out of the possibility for resemblances between species that did not share a common ancestor. Sériot 2014, p. 149.

descended from an original ancestral pair (ERH, 121). There is thus an irrational kernel of monogenesis at the heart of polygenesis.

Firmin's view of evolution was highly heterodox if we consider the context of debate within the Société d'anthropologie. By pragmatically adopting certain aspects of Broca's thought, Firmin sought to counter the rise of Social Darwinism.[174] Under Broca's influence, the Société was forged in the union of polygenism and positivism, the former manifest in the group's rejection of the Biblical unity of the family of man, the latter in its resistance to speculative theorizing.[175] However, despite Broca's guiding influence, the Société was not a monoculture. Its members included prominent monogenists such as Quatrefages and Clémence Royer, Charles Darwin's first French translator.[176] An early proponent of social Darwinism, Royer expanded the scope of the theory of natural selection by applying it to human relations.[177] Positivists within the Société opposed any use of Darwin's theory of evolution, which they regarded as a hypothesis lacking proof, as a justification studying society through the lens of the 'combat for life.'[178] They referred to their opponents as 'materialists', a label which Royer herself rejected.[179] While still alive and at the helm, Broca had been successful in mediating the positions of the materialist and positivist factions. When debate reached an impasse, Broca proved adept at suggesting terms that were neutral in the discursive context of the Société. For instance, he recommended referring to different human groups as 'races' rather than '*espèces'* or '*variété*s', which would imply endorsement of polygenism or monogenism respectively, and using the term *'transformisme'* instead of '*évolutio*n', which obviated the need to endorse or reject Darwin.[180] Yet the environment of amicable debate was not to last. After 1870, the materialists won out, with many positivists leaving. Broca died in 1880. He was succeeded as Secretary General by Topinard, a positivist who was in turn voted out of office in 1886 to be replaced by a

[174] The term 'Social Darwinism' is slightly anachronistic because, as Clark notes, it only became current in France in the 1890s. However, we can follow Clark's lead in applying the term slightly beyond its temporal horizon as 'a label for the rationalziations of the results of economic, military, and racial 'struggles for life' to which historians have long applied it. This definition excludes forms of social evolutionism or social organicism which do not focus on the specifically Darwinian concepts of the struggle for life and natural selection.' Clark, 1984, p. 5.
[175] Harvey 1983, p. 289; Bernasconi 2008, p. 367.
[176] Harvey 1983, p. 291
[177] Russell 2014, p. 55.
[178] Clark 1984, p. 18
[179] Ibid, p. 20.
[180] Wartelle 2014, pp. 128, 131.

materialist.[181] The Société which Firmin knew was therefore more riven by factions than it had been under Broca's leadership. Support for positivism was on the wane, which highlights the polemical nature of Firmin's intervention. The centrality Firmin accorded to Broca makes *De l'Égalité* out of step with the direction scholarly consensus was heading. Fittingly, one of only two reviews that the book received was written by a former associate of Broca, who praised Firmin's thesis that 'l'évolution sociale explique seule les différences de complexion morale et intellectuelle qui existent entre les diverses portions de l'humanité.'[182]

Indeed, the importance of 'social' versus 'biological' evolution in the constitution of mankind was an important area of debate between the two factions of the Société and corresponded to opposing readings of Darwin. Firmin presented his catastrophist account of the origin of species as being compatible with Darwin (ERH 397) and argued that a faithful interpretation of the theory of natural selection would lead one to view racial variety not as degeneration but as evidence of the universal human drive to adapt to unequal circumstances: 'au lieu de sanctionner la doctrine de l'inégalité elle (la théorie darwinienne) prouve plutôt que les races humaines sont constitutionnellement douées d'aptitudes égales' (ERH, 401).[183] Again, Firmin is closely tracking Broca, who was receptive towards Darwin's theories but doubted that nature selected advantageous traits as they arose in individuals because this sounded like the work of a rational deity.[184] However, this was no longer reflective of the dominant reading of Darwin by the time of Firmin's arrival in Paris. Darwin's thought was being deployed as a justification for social practices such as laissez-faire economics.[185] Firmin resisted this elision of society with nature. He painted a Hobbesian portrait of 'l'homme sauvage, désarmé et nu […] un être comdamné à disparaître de la terre avant qu'il ait pu s'apercevoir de la beauté de la nature' (ERH, 412), whose abject state he contrasted with 'le successeur de l'homme antidéluvien, aujourd'hui transformé' (ERH, 413). Firmin's assertion of the boundary between

[181] Harvey 1983, pp. 299-303.
[182] Léonce Manouvrier, [Review of] 'A. Firmin. *De l'Égalité des races humaines*. Paris, F. Pichon, 1885', *Revue philosophique de la France et de l'étranger* XXI (1886), 180-2 (p. 181). Also discussed by Anne-Marie Drouin-Hans, 'Hierarchy of Races, Hierarchy in Gender: Anténor Firmin and Clémence Royer', *Ludus vitalis*, XIII (2005), 163-180 (pp. 167-8). Manouvrier was one of the founding members of Broca's École d'anthropologie, established in 1876. Schiller 1979, p. 278.
[183] Bernasconi has characterized Firmin's reading of Darwin as an attempt 'subtract the more vicious aspects of social Darwinism from the theory of evolution'. Bernasconi 2008, p. 376.
[184] Schiller 1979, p. 229.
[185] Clark 1984, p. 14.

civilized and natural man serves as a response to Royer's Social Darwinism as exhibited in a citation included by Firmin from Royer's preface to Darwin's *Origin of Species*:

> Les données de la théorie de sélection naturelle ne peuvent plus nous laisser douter que les races supérieures ne se soient produites successivement; et que, par conséquent, en vertu de la loi du progrès, elles ne soient destinées à supplanter les races inférieures, en progressant encore, et non à se mélanger et à se confondre avec elles, au risque de s'absorber en elles par des croisements qui feraient baisser le niveau moyen de l'espèce. En un mot, les races humaines ne sont pas des espèces distinctes, mais ce sont des variétés bien tranchées et fort inégales; et il faudrait réfléchir à deux fois avant de proclamer l'égalité politique et civile chez un peuple composé d'une minorité d'Indo-Européens et d'une majorité de Mongols ou de Nègres.[186]

This passage condenses many of the ideas Firmin set out to oppose, from the belief that developmental law favours the triumph of a single variety to the monogenetic preoccupation with bloodlines, purity of origin, and racial inequality. Except perhaps for Gobineau, Royer receives the harshest criticism of any author referred to in *De l'Égalité* and is subject to a misogynistic judgement by Firmin: 'Mme Clémence Royer est une femme savante, mais une femme. Il y a des problèmes dont le caractère complexe ne saurait être bien étudié que par des hommes' (ERH 399). Much could be said about this striking lapse from the otherwise cordial tone Firmin adopts towards his contemporaries.[187] Viewed purely within the philosophical context of evolutionary thought, Royer represented an antithetical viewpoint to Firmin's own. Her application to human racial difference of the Darwinian thesis that 'successively' arising modifications within a single species create varieties unequally fit to survive the struggle of existence led her to view racial difference in

[186] Clémence Royer, 'Préface' in Charles Darwin, *De l'Origine des espèces par sélection naturelle, ou des lois de transformation des êtres organisés*, trans. by Clémence Royer, 3rd edn (Paris: Masson, 1870), pp. v-lxxi (p. lxix). As quoted by Firmin 1885, p. 399, with the exception that Firmin is citing the fourth edition. Firmin seems to have amended Royer's text by replacing 'Indo-Germains' with 'Indo-Européens'. This could be a mistake or it could be a deliberate move done to stress the commonalities between linguistic and racial categorizations as discussed elsewhere in *De l'Égalité*.
[187] See Bernasconi 2008, pp. 375-6.

terms of inequality; her advocacy of biological determinism left no room for improvement or sociological progress, only competition and struggle to the death.[188]

Although not a writer discussed by Marr, Broca's theory of the separate emergence of (in principle) equal races and his Lamarckian views on the improvability of genetic stock through civilization had close parallels in Marr's theory of linguistic evolution. As we shall see, Marr drew on Herbert Spencer's concept of evolutionary patterns and used it to describe the parallel emergence of analogous linguistic phenomena from multiple starting points. Spencer proposed a general theory of *epigenesis* which he used to describe 'the course of change from homogeneity and generality to the heterogeneous and special' and through which Marr interpreted diachronic changes in semantics and phonology.[189] In Marr's hands, epigenesis accounted for the spontaneous emergence of more 'specialized' and 'dissociated' linguistic features from an earlier stage characterized by complex totalities. Epigenesis implied a progressive increase in the developmental pathways open to a given language over the course of its development and thus proved that a language's original composition did not dictate its later evolution, as Schleicher and others had argued. Marr nonetheless introduced an important modification to Spencer's theory. Spencer tended to treat initial forms and the later forms which evolved out of them as 'inferior' and 'superior' respectively.[190] While concurring with Spencer on the fact that primitive forms do not necessarily evolve into higher forms in every case, Marr was at pains to point out that primitiveness by no means meant inferiority or weakness.[191] His view of linguistic primitiveness can be gauged

[188] The following passage could be cited by way of an indication of what Royer meant by the 'successive' emergence of (racial) variety: 'il suffit de la concurrence vitale pour que toute variété, mieux adaptée aux conditions locales, supplante l'espèce-mère dont elle dérive. À travers le long cours des siècles de siècles, cette variété fixée donne à son tour naissance à d'autres par le même moyen. De divergence en divergence, les différences spécifiques deviennent ainsi de valeur générique. De sorte que les croisements entre ces variétés successives bientôt ne donnent plus, au lieu de métis féconds, que des hybrides de plus en plus stériles, jusqu'à ce que le croisement lui-même deviennent impossible.' Royer 1870, p. lxiii.

[189] Brandist 2015, p. 214. Thomas argues this point too: 'there is good reason to suppose that his [Marr's] vision of the development of language from plurality to unity, from diffusion to a more analytical state, is based on Spencer's concept of evolution as a development passing from 'homogeneity' to 'heterogeneity'.' Thomas 1957, p. 115. Velmezova provides an in-depth account of Marr's *semantic* laws and their sources in writers such as Spencer. Cf. Velemezova 2007, p. 357.

[190] Valerie A. Haines, 'Is Spencer's Theory an Evolutionary Theory?', in *American Journal of Sociology*, 93.5 (1988), 1200-1223 (p. 1215). Also referenced by Brandist 2015, p. 214, f. 81.

[191] 'As Spencer stressed, in both biological and social organisms, structural change occurs in response to environmental pressures. A more heterogeneous or 'advanced' structure will develop, therefore, only if the environment demands more complex habits.' Haines 1988, p. 1215.

by his treatment of the Chuvash language and his effusiveness towards Chuvash speakers, to whom he explained 'that their language was utterly primitive, saturated with fossilized words, close to Sumerian and to the most prehistoric state which is possible to be found in a language currently spoken'.[192] Although he was fascinated by the way that some languages today retain archaic features, Marr also argued that no language as a whole could be treated as a living fossil or as exhibiting a state of arrested development. Far from being a mere 'diverting curiosity', Marr thought that primitivisms would prove essential to the eventual formation of the single world language which was set to reintegrate all previous stages of linguistic history.[193] Above all, the evolution of language did not reveal to Marr the hand of the creator but rather the ceaseless collective efforts of man. Language did not arise from 'an initial act of creation [pervotvorčestva]' but was 'the fruit of mankind's creative labour'.[194] Human society was the forger of language. And just as society emerged and developed according to the same stadial pattern—following, as it were, an overarching 'unité de plan'—so too did language, which developed in congruent ways across the globe but arose out of countless separate points of origin.

Marr directly addressed the perennial question of the origin of language in an article of 1926, in which he argued that this defining human trait was not a gift of nature but arose out of man's social existence and was independently invented at multiple points across the globe; anywhere, in fact, that society formed so too did the rudiments of language, and these eventually merged and coalesced. [195] This article

[192] Sèriot 2020, p. 5.
[193] Nikolai Marr, 'Jazyk i myšlenie' [1931], in *Izbrannye raboty*, III (1934), pp. 90-122 (p. 107).
[194] Marr [1920], p. 89.
[195] Although Marr wrote it in Russian, the text was published simultaneously in German translation in the Vienna-based journal *Unter dem Banner des Marxismus*. The explanatory and programmatic nature of the article, combined with the circumstances of its publication, allowed Marr to reach a wider audience than he usually did through his more technical pieces.

contains Marr's famous hand-drawn diagram of the global glottogonic process, which he depicted as a tree:

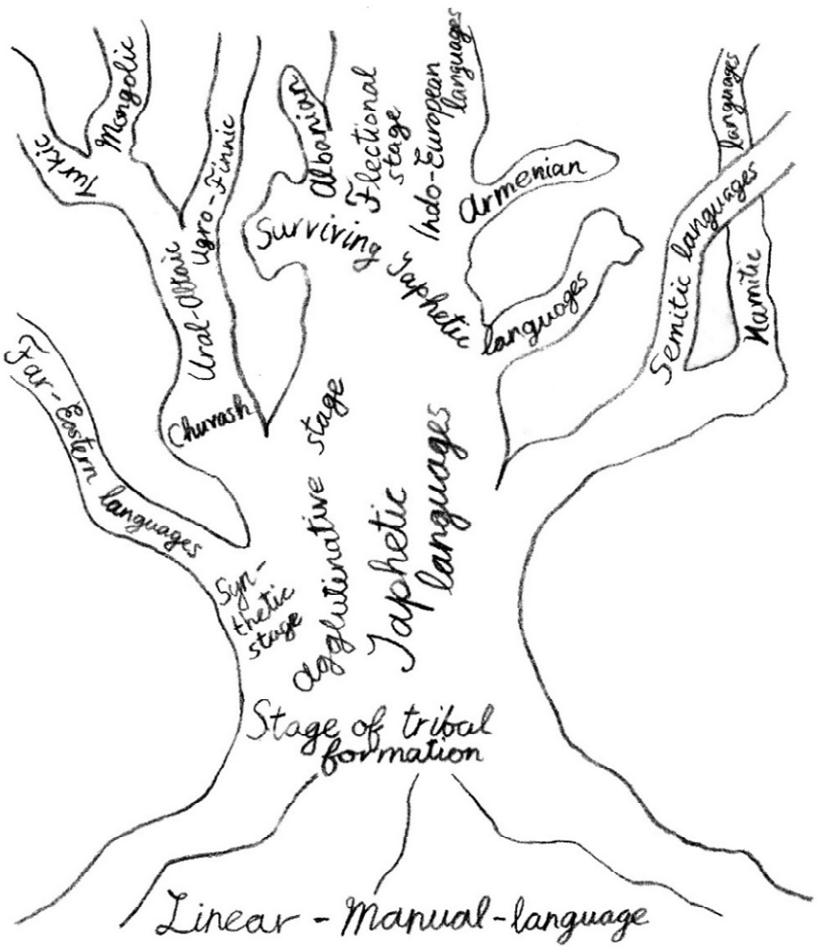


Figure 2: Nikolai Marr, Genealogical tree, 1926, annotations translated from the Russian and hand drawn as in the original publication.

This extraordinary diagram displays the history not of a single linguistic family, but the entire global process of linguistic evolution. It contains both convergence and divergence, unlike Schleicher's Indo-European Stammbaum. Schleicher's Stammbaum closely follows Darwin (see Figure 1, above) in depicting the emergence of linguistic variety via successive divergence from a common trunk. The gnarled trunk of Marr's genealogical tree reflects the fact that it represents both the ideal sequence of linguistic evolution and the specificity of its historical realization. Following the trunk upwards from its base, we traverse successive morphological stages (agglutination and flection) towards the top of which the Indo-European languages emerge. This reflects the fact that these languages arose out of a

typological transformation of earlier linguistic stages. Numerous languages and linguistic families are depicted as branching off from the main trunk. Chuvash is accorded prominence because it stands at the very start of the Ural-Altaic family's divergence from the central trunk. Marr explains that languages which split off from the trunk remained locked into the morphological composition they acquired at the moment of divergence, but that they continued to develop in parallel, ascending every upwards 'within the confines of a norm that had been superseded within the trunk'.[196] The canopy of the tree, not depicted on the diagram, would correspond to the 'theoretical crowning of all preceding stages of linguistic development in the single universal [obščečelovečeskaja] language of humanity.[197] The glottogonic process therefore culminates in a grand convergence in which difference is retained rather than obliterated. It would be easy to overlook the importance of the origin of the global linguistic process, depicted here as the roots of the tree. However, it is worth considering this stage in greater detail because it is crucial to Marr's understanding of how the universal human faculty of speech emerged from multiple starting points before converging during the 'stage of tribal formation.'

Marr argued that spoken language as we know it did not exist from the very outset; that it was preceded by an earlier iteration of linguistic communication which emerged everywhere independently, and that out of these disparate beginnings an eventual merger occurred which produced the initial stage of spoken language. The conditions of primitive society favoured gestural (or 'manual', '*ručnoj*') rather than spoken language, and the prevailing conceptual structures employed in that era made it impossible for speech to serve as a medium of communication: 'humanity's initial language was not spoken [zvukovaja]. It was not, and moreover could not have been, spoken due to the fact that primitive humanity perceived and conceptualized the surrounding world in images, for which sounds would have been an unsuitable means of conveyance'.[198] Moreover, gesture was a wholly adequate means of communication for primitive humanity because it served the function of encoding meaning:

[196] Marr [1926]c, p. 196.
[197] Ibid, p. 195.
[198] Ibid, p. 200.

> Gestural language already exhibits all the traits that separate human language from animal expostulations: it is far from being a language lacking conscious reflex; it is not a language which in its entirety issues forth involuntarily from internal physical stimuli.[199]

By making a distinction between language and humanity's primitive vocalizations, Marr (much like Firmin) drove a wedge between society and the state of nature:

> The language of animals in its rudimentary form employs affective means, provided by nature, consisting of sounds, as is the case for birds, or movements, as in the case of ants. The phonetic means that birds have at their disposal is enormous when it comes to song, but this amounts to a non-arbitrary sound, which is not the same as a linguistic sound. In language we are dealing not with sound, but with the phoneme, the articulated [členorazdel'nyj] sound developed by humanity […].[200]

The opposition between the situation-bound emotionally reactive expostulation and the articulated structure of the linguistic sign acquired a prominent place in Marr's thinking thereafter. As he would later argue: 'sounds had absolutely no part to play in the process of manual communication [ručnogo govorenija], if we exclude affective expostulations [vykriki affekta], although these in no way constituted articulated sounds'.[201] Eventually sound did come to be domesticated, in a process that occurred in conjunction with the formation of tribes. The primitive tribe 'possessed one single acoustic complex' which later served as 'the name of that given tribe and of any individual belonging to it.' Limited to use within the single tribe, 'this acoustic complex was still an animal sound, only latterly becoming

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[199] Ibid, p. 202. Also quoted by Sériot 2020, p. 19.
[200] Marr [1926]c, pp. 199-200.
[201] Nikolaj Marr [1927], p. 85. This distinction between articulation and affect was not unique to Marr. Its origins lay in eighteenth century debates on the origin of language and the dividing line between human speech and the vocalizations of animals. Condillac premised his discussion on the 'basic distinction between natural gestures and 'les cris naturels' on the one hand and on the other the artificial and, in this sense arbitrary, vocal signs of the language and speech that is uniquely human'. Hans Aarsleff , 'The Tradition of Condillac: The Problem of the Origin of Language in the Eighteenth Century and the Debate in the Berlin Academy before Herder' [1974], in *From Locke to Saussure: Essays on the Study of Language and Intellectual History* (London: Athlone, 1982), pp. 146-209 (p. 151). Enquiry into the social, rather than biological nature of language continued through the nineteenth and into the twentieth century. The debate was taken up by an array of thinkers alluded to but not fully acknowledged by Marr. Thomas provides an overview of these thinkers, which he sees as a sign of Marr's eclecticism and attachment to pre-Marxist theories of social evolution (1957, 111-114).

human in its development towards articulation'.[202] It was not a means of communication between individuals; rather, it was articulated in chants and gained a magical significance when used to address the tribal totem. Over time, the primitive undifferentiated sound complex was rearticulated not as a single complex sound but as a sequence of differentiated sounds. This happened gradually; indeed, Marr refers elsewhere to intermediary stages of differentiation which include 'diffuse, which is to say incompletely articulated [ne sovsem členorazdel'nykh]' sounds.[203] The increased articulation of sound was only half the story. For sound to be able to encode meaning, it had to take on the syntactical structures already present within gestural language. To begin with, sound was used as a 'supplement [pridatok]' to gestural language, in the same way that 'today, conversely, we supplement spoken language with hand gestures, mimicry etc'.[204] The final stage in the development of spoken language followed the advent of commerce between tribes which necessitated a consolidation and standardisation of the linguistic system. Inter-tribal contact led to the 'convergence [skhoždenie]' each tribe's phonetic repertoire, expanding the possibilities for spoken communication and 'provid[ing] the tribe with material that was indifferent [bezrazličnyj] with respect to meaning, which could be used for the phonetic expression of man's mental concepts as they existed at that time.'[205]

Marr's genealogical tree of language and the theory which informed it attempted to explain how a highly complex but nonetheless unified process could emerge out of multiple inchoate beginnings. As a model depicting the totality of human linguistic activity from prehistory to the present (and beyond), the glottogonic scheme attempted to do justice to linguistic variety by treating it as the complex realization of an evolutionary pattern which, although unerring in its upward trajectory, could be realized in multiple ways. Marr drew on such largely unacknowledged sources as Herbert Spencer when it came to identifying patterns beneath the surface layer of complexity. Spencer, on the face of it, would seem to be an unlikely source for a self-proclaimed Marxist theory of language. Nonetheless, Spencer's view of human nature as fluid and evolving lent itself to materialist

[202] Marr [1926]c, p. 204.
[203] Marr [1927], p., 16
[204] Marr [1926]c, p. 204.
[205] Ibid, p. 207.

critique. Enthusiasm for Spencer was common among many of Marr's contemporaries in Russia, who saw the British sociologist's concept of universal laws of development as a means of overturning dogmas of racial supremacy.[206] Equipped with his decidedly non-comparativist conceptual toolkit, Marr felt confident that he could interpret the entire trajectory of linguistic evolution and hasten its eventual harmonious resolution.

## 1.5 Conclusion

Firmin and Marr challenged a narrow theory of progress which celebrated the rise of the European and North American 'core' to the detriment of the margins and explained the former's ascendancy on the grounds of its innate superiority. The strategy adopted by Firmin and Marr involved trenchant discursive critique and the mobilization of eclectic intellectual sources in the interests of reviving an older notion of universal progress and updating it to the standards of contemporary evolutionary theory. This was an intervention designed to refute the unholy alliance between Biblical creationism and 'survival of the fittest' evolutionism. In many respects Firmin and Marr were not so much anti-Darwinian as advocates of a broader interpretation of Darwin. Natural selection had come to be interpreted as leading to the triumph of the single variety possessing the most advantageous traits and encouraging its eventual triumph to the exclusion of all other varieties. This was not necessarily Darwin's view, but rather that of the Social Darwinists. Darwin himself seemed to suggest that multiple varieties within a single species could become successful in different environments. He intended his diagram of branching paths to illustrate the principle that 'the modified descendants of any one species will succeed by so much the better as they become more diversified in structure, and are thus enabled to encroach on places occupied by other beings.'[207] This passage gives prominence to the competition for resources between separate species but does not rank emergent varieties within a single species against one another. Rather, different varieties are presented as being equally legitimate and potentially successful

[206] Brandist 2015, p. 53.
[207] Darwin 1859, p. 116.

adaptations to diverse environments. Thus, the ranking of (human) variety according to a single yardstick merely reflected one possible reading of Darwin, and Firmin therefore had some basis for thinking that his own broader sense of progress could be accommodated within evolutionism. Marr's categorical denial that competition and extinction govern the life of languages places him among a category of thinkers favouring cooperative and convergent evolution. They were well represented in Russia at the turn of the twentieth century, although generally they saw themselves in opposition to Darwin.[208] Perhaps the most important difference between Darwinism, broadly construed, and the work of our two thinkers is that Firmin and Marr denied that genetic entities such as languages and races are locked into a fixed developmental pathway set out before them at the moment of their 'creation': whether in an act of divine creative will or at the point when the evolutionary ancestor first diverged from the common trunk. Instead, they thought that the racial and linguistic varieties comprising humanity were acted upon uniformly by the same laws and that the development of these varieties could be shaped by society and steered in an upward direction. Of course, neither of our thinkers was able to determine where the principle of 'law-boundedness' first arose—a problem endemic to positivism.[209]

A more troubling problem, with many risks left in store, was the way Firmin and Marr saw peoples' boundedness to a particular geographical space as a way of guarding against the loss of diversity. The preservation of difference up to and, indeed, beyond the final phase of history was essential to both thinkers, a point which becomes clearer if we consider how they treated the 'end' point of history. Both thought that the culminating phase of history would be harmonious and conciliatory, but they did not think that it would lead to uniformity. Firmin concluded *De l'Égalité* by forecasting a future in which races learn to love each other and to develop individually 'sous les latitudes qui leur sont propres' (ERH, 659). Love and mutual respect would come from an acknowledgement of inviolable difference. If for Gobineau, as Lévi-Strauss argued, 'la tare de la dégénérescence s'attachait […] au phénomène du métissage plutôt qu'à la position de chaque race dans une échelle de valeurs commune à toutes', we must question how far Firmin

[208] Sériot 2014, pp. 160-1.
[209] See Oizerman 1984, p. 204.

really refuted the 'Essai sur l'inégalité des races humaines.'[210] Marr too built in a mechanism for the preservation of distinction at the apotheosis of history. The future world language, whose place was reserved atop Marr's genealogical tree, would be unlike anything that had come before: 'a new unified language based on the final accomplishments of both manual and sound languages—a language wherein supreme beauty will merge with the highest development of the mind.'[211] It would not take the form of any one existing language, whether it be Russian or Esperanto, gaining supremacy over all others. Indeed, to interfere in the process of consolidation leading to this language, in a manner that did not respect the 'right to cultural self-determination of all nations', would lead to a 'cultural catastrophe'.[212] Avoiding a flattening uniformity required Firmin and Marr to guard against the disappearance of difference, and in this respect geographic space played an important role. Firmin presented climate as a differential between different racial varieties. Not only was the colonial subjugation of Haiti—either historically by France or by some other power in the future—morally wrong, but it also ran counter to racial adaptation to climate:

> Cette protection salutaire que les plantes indigènes trouvent dans les influences climatologiques, pour lutter contre une espèce étrangère et la chasser de l'aire géographique qui leur est naturelle, existe aussi bien pour les hommes. L'Européen portera ses pas aux confins du monde habité; par ses armes perfectionnées, par son éducation et, surtout, par la conviction profonde qu'il a de sa supériorité ethnique, il obtiendra des victoires faciles: mais il ne s'établira dans certains milieux que pour s'éteindre […] (ERH, 649).

Firmin's thesis of racial equality was fundamentally ambivalent. Although he argued that racial difference was immaterial to human merit, racial difference was an essential principle for delineating separate zones of the world politically. Marr's abhorrence at linguistic subjugation was connected to his sense that languages arise out of their respective geographical zones, and that they ought to be allowed to continue their upward developmental ascent unmolested by aggressive neighbours.

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[210] Lévi-Strauss [1952], p. 8.
[211] Marr [1931], pp. 111-2; as quoted and translated by Slezkine 1996 p. 843.
[212] Nikolaj Marr, 'Pis'mo i jazyk buduščego (Ob odnoj iz grjaduščikh zadač Vsesojuznoj Akademii nauk)', *Vestnik znanija* 15 (1925)b, 1010-1016 (p. 1015).

Marr thought that individual languages arise from geographic 'nests' and undergo in situ development.[213] He viewed local culture as being endowed with 'creative life force [tvorčeskuju žiznedejatel'nost']'; it was this force which propelled growth and development.[214] And regardless of the changes wrought by 'globalizing' forces such as conquest and imperial rule, the authentically local variety (of language or culture) ultimately gains the upper hand. Languages, Marr argued, do not interact with one another according to the logic of the 'struggle for survival', according to which one variety proves its evolutionary advantage by invading the territories of its competitors and driving them to extinction:

> species [vidy], even species of language, have never died out in such a primitive way; languages on their own have never been absorbed [ne pogloščalis'] by other languages in the manner of that simplified rendering of the life process whose deceptive clarity is the hallmark of abstract reflections on this subject; rather, they crossed with one another in a material way, and in this crossing [skreščenii] the species being destroyed by the new community found their salvation, and often in fact triumphed, by transforming the very nature of the languages that seemingly were absorbing them without leaving a trace.[215]

Any loss of variety was abhorrent to Marr and would rob the future world language of its richness. The future world language would mobilize all the marginalized and overlooked languages across the world. For this to be possible, their difference needed to be preserved, as did the autonomy of the indigenous community from which they arose. The global glottogonic theory, although centripetal in its final stages, was hostile to any premature linguistic fusion. The separateness in space of languages, each bound to its native soil, was needed for the eventual temporal resolution to be both successful and equitable, much as for Firmin the harmonious resolution of history relied upon a mutual recognition of both equality and *separateness* among races. In theory at least, our two thinkers could reconcile the existence geographical differentials without calling into question the unity of the developmental process; however, this aspect of their respective theoretical constructs

[213] Marr [1926]c, p. 183.
[214] Nikolaj Marr, 'Kavkaz i pamjatniki dukhovnoj kul'tury', *Izvestija Rossijskoj Akademii Nauk*, 6 (1912), 69-82 (p. 72).
[215] Marr [1920], p. 90.

represented a point of weakness which would be tested by events in the material world.

The next two chapters will examine how other political and intellectual commitments tested Firmin's and Marr's universalist theory. *De l'Égalité* was written at the start of Firmin's career; subsequent events on the international stage, which Firmin witnessed at first hand, raised doubts about the thesis that universal developmental law would preserve Haiti's sovereignty and enhance the country's prosperity. This was a troubling realization which Firmin shared with contemporary writers and politicians in the Spanish Americas. Many of these figures in the Spanish Americas, with whom Firmin was acquainted, rejected a culturally neutral concept of civilization and replaced it with one that treated culture as a meaningful differential in the way different nations and national communities developed. These figures invented 'Latin America' along with related concepts used to describing the Antilles as supra-national communities which differed culturally from the United States. This approach was appealing to Firmin when it came to addressing Haiti's situation on the world stage, but it brought with it certain significant pitfalls. Firmin would have to contend with the limitations of the concept of Latin America which lay in its treatment of race: namely, it identified the specificity of Latin American culture with the ethnic and racial fusion that constituted Latin American society. This was an equation which, as Firmin came to discover, was not conducive to the political emancipation of Haiti and Afrodescendant communities elsewhere in the Caribbean. While he sought to make culture—especially the French language—into a meaningful differential for determining Haiti's place in the Americas, Firmin would have to avoid the ethnic determinism pursued by Latin American thinkers, all the while preventing Haiti from falling into the exclusive cultural orbit of France. Chapter 2 will trace Firmin's involvement with transnational political and cultural movements in the Caribbean and examine his alternative vision for Haiti's culture which emerged out of the failure of these movements. Chapter 3 will examine Marr's similarly fraught engagement with dominant ideas of cultural difference. Despite his universalism, which continued to evolve over the course of his career, Marr did not always approach linguistic material with an eye to assigning it a place within a single global system. He also approached linguistic material (along with artistic and material culture remains) as evidence of the historical community which produced it.

He was especially interested in recovering the creative contribution of demotic or otherwise marginalized communities whose importance had been overshadowed by hegemonic powers. Marr's attentiveness to demotic culture was combined with an anxiety over the homogenizing forces of globalization which he shared with many thinkers of the period, from Russia to Latin America.[216] These interests began early in Marr's career and continued well beyond the Russian revolution. Indeed, they intersected with early Soviet nationality policy which was itself driven by the conflicting need to gather ethnographic knowledge of the marginalized populations of the former Russian Empire precisely so that they could be set on the path towards a unified classless society. Marr shared an interest with contemporary German and Austrian scholars in recovering the forgotten sources of European and Near Eastern culture, and his methods resembled theirs as well: Marr was adept at piecing together fragmented remains to reveal the contours of a lost cultural whole which produced them.[217] However, these contemporary scholars typically assigned cultural wholes to essentialized ethno-racial identities. Chapter 3 will examine Marr's attempt to disentangle creative collectives from ethnic groups. Although he and Firmin were embedded in very distinct contexts and scholarly debates, both thinkers parallel one another in wishing to treat cultural particulars as a way for marginalized peoples to exercise their agency, all the while avoiding the temptation to yoke culture with ethnicity and race.

[216] For the Russian 'Eurasian' movement and its role in defining a 'third continent' immune to Europeanization, see Sériot 2014, pp. 30-2.
[217] This is characteristic of 'Strzygowski's object-oriented and in situ analysis' which approached artifacts 'by determining their parent form' and correlated the diffusion of artistic forms to the migration of ethnic groups. Talinn Grigor, '*Orient oder Rom?* Qajar 'Aryan' Architecture and Strzygowski's Art History', *The Art Bulletin* 89.3 (2007), 562-90 (pp. 584-5).

## Chapter 2. Between Black Emancipation and Latin American Identity: Firmin and the Project of Caribbean Confederation

### 2.1 Introduction

Firmin's mature *political* career taught him bitter lessons which forced a modification to the idealism he had expressed in *De l'Égalité des races humaines*: namely, that the laws of universal progress were on their own no guarantee that Haiti would maintain its sovereignty or that the cause of global black emancipation would be fulfilled. During his years of service in government and as a diplomat, Firmin had observed at first hand the rise of the United States as the supreme regional power and had ascertained the risk posed to Haiti's sovereignty by the republic's northern neighbour. In *De l'Égalité*, Firmin had celebrated the abolition of slavery in the United States as a victory of reason over superstition, and a delayed but inevitable corollary to the Haitian Revolution, which would allow African Americans to obtain equal rights and ascend to the highest offices of state.[1] However, Firmin's belief that Haiti had an ally in the progressive and enlightened US was modified by intervening events. A new 'universalist' world order was being drawn up according to which American trade and power were to have free reign unimpeded by national boundaries and declining European empires. In 1891, one year after the publication of Admiral Mahan's *The Influence of Sea Power upon History*, a work which was to have a lasting influence on American strategic thinking, Firmin was directly involved in a dispute which pitted Haitian sovereignty against United States' plans for expanding their naval might.[2] The United States had ambitions on the excellent natural harbour of the Môle Saint-Nicolas in the north of Haiti, which would be an ideal location for a coaling station. Firmin well understood Haiti's strategic importance for protecting

[1] Firmin 1885, p. 593. Cf. Dubois 2012, p. 167.
[2] Alfred T. Mahan, *The Influence of Sea Power Upon History, 1660-1783* (Boston: Little Brown, 1891). Although it is argued that Mahan's influence on Theodore Roosevelt has been overstated and that Roosevelt 'grasped the fundamentals of sea power well before Captain Mahan published *The Influence of Sea Power*', this does not prevent us from arguing that Mahan's work was a particularly forceful articulation of ideas which were in the air at the time. Henry J. Hendrix, 'Roosevelt's Naval Thinking Before Mahan', in *Theodore Roosevelt, the U.S. Navy, and the Spanish-American War*, ed by Edward J. Marolda (New York: Palgrave, 2001), pp. 49-59 (pp. 49-50).

American assets in Panama.[3] He was tasked with negotiating a lease but, despite the pressure of US warships which materialized in the harbour of Port-au-Prince, finally declined the American entreaties owing to the infringement of national sovereignty such a move would entail.[4] Despite this moment of victory for national sovereignty, the era was nonetheless the birth of the American Century. The momentous year 1898 marked the death of the Spanish Empire, and into the void marched the US, with the annexation of Puerto Rico, Guam, the Philippines, and the imposition of military rule over Cuba. In his very last publication, Firmin gloomily foretold that Cuba's fate could also befall Haiti.[5] Whereas in *De l'Égalité* Firmin had interpreted the unerring laws of progress as fostering sovereignty and an egalitarian world order, experience suggested that they could simply allow the most materially advanced country to become a global hegemon.

This chapter will consider how these changing political circumstances affected Firmin's ideas as they were expressed in his last major work. In the *Lettres de Saint Thomas* (1910), Firmin revisited the question of universality and difference in historical development, but in contrast to his early work he now sought to make cultural difference relevant to development. In *De l'Égalité*, cultural particulars occupied a position of secondary importance with respect to the universal process of development. In that work, Firmin argued that all nations are equally capable of developing and achieving modernity under their own impetus. This meant that 'civilization' functioned as a universal scale of values and, although different nations and races progress independently of one another, their cultural products are not sharply differentiated from one another. Human reason, Firmin argued, was not affected by cultural or linguistic difference. However, by the end of his career, Firmin began exploring characteristics of Haiti's culture which differentiated it from other countries, especially those belonging to the Anglo-American world. These considerations came about partly through Firmin's commitment to the cause of

[3] Anténor Firmin, *M. Roosevelt, Président des Etats-Unis et la République d'Haïti* (Paris: Pichon, 1905), pp. 476-7. Cf. Jeff Karem, *The Purloined Islands: Caribbean-U.S. Crosscurrents in Literature and Culture 1880-1959* (University of Virginia Press; Charlottesville and London, 2011), p. 27.
[4] Dubois 2012, pp. 190-4.
[5] 'Cependant même après ma mort, il faudra de deux choses l'une: ou Haïti passe sous une domination étrangère, ou elle adopte résolument les principes au nom desquels j'ai toujours lutté et combattu [viz. the rejection of tyranny].' Anténor Firmin, *L'Effort dans le mal* [1911] (Port-au-Prince: Panorama, 1962), p. 39; quoted by Elinet Daniel, 'Anténor Firmin y José Martí. Crítica epistemológica y perspectivas desde el Caribe insular' (Unpublished doctoral thesis, Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México, 2017), p. 181, f. 287; and Dubois 2012, p. 202.

Caribbean confederation, a political movement which involved many progressive intellectuals from the region and which Firmin reflected upon in the *Lettres*. In this text, Firmin recalled his involvement with these figures and meditated upon their treatment of culture as a basis for creating political solidarity. In examining the *Lettres*, we can detect a shift from Firmin's earlier sense that civilization described a universal scale of development to a new sense that civilization manifested itself differently according to culture. This revision can be read as a reaction to the political events of Firmin's life which showed that progress, rather than fostering an egalitarian order, led to the hegemony of the North over the South. Something more than faith in progress was needed if Haiti, and indeed the Caribbean as a whole, were to avoid 'l'absorption menaçante de la grande république étoilée.'[6]

Firmin's attempt to mediate development through cultural difference, thereby defining multiple pathways of social and cultural progress beyond the emulation of the United States, aligns him with a long tradition of Latin American thinkers who, as Walter Mignolo put it, were 'confronting the dilemma of wanting to be modern and, at the same time, realizing that they were consigned to the fringes of modernity'.[7] Elites in the Spanish Americas wanted the prosperity of rich countries but were afraid that the means of attaining this would undermine their political and cultural autonomy. Despite the mid-nineteenth century consensus that economic growth would come from 'closer integration into the world economy through commodity exports and capital imports', events at the end of the century demonstrated that this policy was insufficient for increasing prosperity and for warding off foreign interference, not least from the United States.[8] At an ideological level, a compelling solution to the dilemma of modernization lay in defining a set of cultural values which set 'Latin America' apart in relation to 'Anglo-Saxon' North America.[9] Introducing cultural difference within a programme of modernization and development allowed Latin American intellectuals to conceive of their countries not as inferior or backward with respect to the United States—in need of emulating their

[6] Anténor Firmin, *Lettres de Saint Thomas* (Paris: Giard et Brière, 1910), p. 116.
[7] Mignolo 2005, p. 71.
[8] Victor Bulmer-Thomas, *The Economic History of Latin America Since Independence* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), pp. 46-8.
[9] From the very outset, 'Latinity' was defined in opposition to Anglo-Saxon America, with the values attributed to the former oscillating between its intrinsic cultural distinctiveness and its supposed racial inferiority and tendency to decadence. Cf. Michela Coletta, *Decadent Modernity: Civilization and 'Latinidad' in Spanish America, 1880-1920* (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2018), pp. 30-2.

Northern neighbour—but as intrinsically different and thus incomparable. A crucial articulation of this idea was in the work of the Uruguayan intellectual José Enrique Rodó, most famously in his philosophical essay *Ariel* (1900). According to the sermon delivered in this essay, the 'prosperity and power' of the United States 'is dazzling testimony to the efficacy of its institutions and to the guidance of its concepts.'[10] However, slavish imitation of the 'North' ('nordomanía') and a disregard of 'the forces of heritage and custom' will not bear fruit:

> I do not […] see what is to be gained from denaturalizing the character—the *personality*—of a nation, from imposing an identification with a foreign model, while sacrificing irreplaceable uniqueness. Nor do I see anything to be gained from the ingenuous belief that identity can somehow be achieved through artificial and improvised imitation.[11]

Rodó was one of many intellectuals who saw Latin America as endowed with its own unique culture that set it apart from the United States—'materialist' and 'utilitarian' in Rodó's terms—and the old European power Spain whose authority and example had long waned.[12] This political and intellectual project of defining a unifying post-independence cultural identity for the Spanish Americas was known as 'Latinidad.'[13] It inspired thinkers in the Caribbean, a region which fell within the cultural purview of *latinidad* but which was also thought of as separate and as expressing its own distinct though complimentary cultural identity in relation to the continent of South America. The idea of Caribbean regionalism, or 'Antillanismo' was influenced by the project of *latinidad*, although the two can also be thought of as subject to the same epistemological framework which this chapter seeks to excavate through Firmin's work. Both projects were structured around a rejection of, as they

[10] José Enrique Rodó, *Ariel* [1900]a, trans. by Margaret Sayers Peden (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1988), p. 71.
[11] Ibid, p. 72. For the concept of 'nordomanía' as it was initially articulated, see José Enrique Rodó, 'Ariel' [1900]b, in *Obras completas*, ed. Emir Rodríguez Monegal (Madrid: Aguilar, 1967), pp. 196-249 (p. 233). Coletta discusses Rodó's 'nordomanía' in the context of his fears of the loss of Latin American cultural tradition. Coletta 2016, p. 36.
[12] 'Torres Caicedo and other Spanish American intellectuals gradually appropriated this form of identification [i.e. the 'Latin race'] as a way to distance themselves from the colonial past and a Hispanic culture that was increasingly perceived as backward.' Chaar-Pérez, 2013, p. 27, citing Mignolo 2005, p. 60.
[13] 'White Creole and Mestizo/a elites, in South America and the Spanish Caribbean islands, after independence from Spain adopted 'Latinidad' to create their own postcolonial identity. Consequently, I am arguing here, *'Latin'* America is not so much a subcontinent as it is the political project of Creole-Mestizo/a elites.' Ibid, p. 59. Also quoted by Coletta 2018, p. 32.

saw it, the political and cultural world view embodied by the United States—'l'homme du nord', as Firmin put it (LST, 92).

Firmin was closely associated with the project of building a Pan-Caribbean confederation. He viewed Haiti as culturally, ideologically, and geo-politically aligned with countries such as Puerto Rico and Cuba which were engaged in hard-fought independence struggles but which, individually, may be too weak to maintain their sovereignty on the world stage. His recollections of his friendships and contacts among members of this Caribbean political movement, with its connections to the related project of *latinidad*, form a short but significant part of the *Lettres*. Firmin's extended periods of residence in Paris brought him into contact with 'un noyau remarquable d'Americano-Latins, presque tous de langue espagnole' (LST, 109) who resided in the French capital and strategized the formation of a transnational federation of Caribbean states. Firmin is vague when it comes to dates and accords a high degree of cohesiveness to a movement which, in reality, was composed of several disparate and changing circles. His recollections have a nostalgic, even elegiac, tone which captures the intellectual spirit of the time, if not the particulars.[14] Firmin sums up the aims of the ex-patriate thinkers as follows:

> Leur rêve était l'émancipation intellectuelle et morale de tous ceux dont l'essor est comprimé par quelque force extérieure, despotisme national ou exploitation coloniale. Ils aspiraient à établir un lien international qui rendît chacun des pays latino-américains associés aux efforts et au développement des autres. (LST, 109)[15]

As he recalls, Paris was a meeting point for American intellectuals who were in some cases forced into exile from the colonial and neo-colonial governments at home, and in their new foreign settings found ways to strategize a new international

[14] There were many associations of Latin American intellectuals in Paris in the second half of the nineteenth century. Their shifting names and membership lists make it difficult to determine precisely who was involved with which group when. According to one account, Firmin was a member of Betances' 'Society of Latin American Unity.' Chaar-Perez 2013, p. 12. It is unclear, though conceivable, that this was the same organization as the 'Union Latino-Américaine' established by Torres Caicedo in 1879. Jens Streckert, *Die Hauptstadt Lateinamerikas: Eine Geschichte der Lateinamerikaner im Paris der Dritten Republik (1870-1940),* (Cologne, Weimar, Vienna: Böhlau, 2013), p. 201.

[15] 'The premises of nineteenth-century *antillanista* projects, […] emphasized the integration of the Antillean islands, as well as Central and South America, into a single political-economic unit', Alaí Reyes-Santos, *Our Caribbean Kin: Race and Nation in the Neoliberal Antilles* (New Brunswick, N.J., and London: Rutgers University Press, 2015), p. 30.

order.[16] This history of French republicanism offered an attractive alternative to the despotism of Spanish rule in the eyes of many of these intellectuals.[17] The individuals mentioned by name in the *Lettres* include the Colombian intellectual and publicist José María Torres Caicedo (whom Firmin dubs 'la représentation personnifiée, pour ainsi dire, de l'Amérique espagnole' [LST, 111]), a writer credited with coining the term 'América Latina' as a way of designating the Spanish Americas without implying their dependence on the old imperial metropole.'[18] Firmin accords greatest prominence, however, to the Puerto Rican writer and independence campagainer Ramón Emeterio Betances, who conceived of a 'Confédération des Antilles' (LST, 113) as a means of securing the sovereignty of countries which would otherwise be too small to fend off foreign encroachment. The basis for such a confederation, as Firmin recalls, lay in the 'le contact fréquent, facile, et continu' that existed between the populations of those islands (LST, 113). Betances was very favourably disposed to Haiti and took up his pen to defend the country against its European detractors.[19] His conception of *antillanismo*, unusual even within the context of Latin American thought, cited Haiti as a central revolutionary antecedent in the history of the Americas.[20] Firmin also fondly recalled his meeting with the most celebrated of the period's independence leaders, the Cuban José Martí. Likewise embedded in the networks of Puerto Rican and Antillean independence, albeit in New York rather than Paris, Martí had one brief but significant meeting with Firmin in Haiti (LST, 115).[21] As a writer and journalist, Martí produced some of the most forceful and influential articulations of Latin American identity. If the *Lettres* are sometimes thin on factual details, they are suffused with the traces of *latinista* and *antillanista* cultural discourse which Firmin

[16] Ibid, pp. 41-2, Streckert 2013, p. 272. Alongside the prominent exiles were many students from the Spanish Americas attending university in Paris. Ibid, pp. 123-4.
[17] Reyes-Santos 2015, p. 39; Chaar-Perez 2016, p. 21.
[18] Cf. Arturo Ardao, *Génesis de la idea y el nombre de América Latina* (Caracas: Centro de Estudios Latinoamericanos Rómulo Gallegos, 1980), pp. 72-3. Other scholars have traced the transfer of the term 'Latin America' from Michel Chevalier to Torres Caicedo; the former employing it as a justification for French foreign policy ambitions in the Americas, the latter put it to the service of regional identity. Mignolo 2005, p. 79; McGuiness 2003, p. 99.
[19] Betances mobilized the spirit of regional solidarity in his defence of Haiti's reputation, signing an open letter published in France as 'El Antillano.' Reyes-Santos 2015, pp. 41-2.
[20] Ibid, p. 35.
[21] During his American exile, Martí relied heavily on the revolutionary Puerto Rican associations in the United States such as the Club Borinquen, which supported his cause financially and published his newspaper *Patria*. Josefina Toledo, 'Ramón Emeterio Betances en la Génesis de los Clubes Borinquen y Mercedes Varona', in *Pasión por la Libertad*, ed. by Félix Ojeda Reyes and Paul Estrade (San Juan, Puerto Rico: Editorial de la Universidad de Puerto Rico, 2000), pp. 14-30, (pp. 18, 23-8).

both echoed and subtly critiqued as he considered Haiti's place in a hypothetical regional confederation.

Firmin's *Lettres* are interesting because they distil the philosophical premises of regional confederation even if Firmin's explicit criticism of these ideas remains elusive. Writers who theorized confederations, whether comprising the Caribbean or Latin America (the latter often serving as a model for the former), defined them as holistic entities comprising a common culture. These thinkers celebrated culture which they thought of as authentically demotic and reflective of the common worldview of the popular masses of all the confederated countries. In turn, they imagined the popular masses, either within a single nation or across all the confederated nations, to be ethnically consolidated, the product of a sweeping process of hybridization which transcended the ethnic and national distinctions which hitherto had divided the various segments of Latin American society.[22] Firmin's text records the tropes and concepts of this discourse while subtly challenging it. Firmin apparently came to doubt the existence of a latent Pan-Caribbean identity already present in the minds of the popular masses. He also queried the assumption that popular beliefs and practices should serve as the basis for authentic national culture. In essence, this querying of the role of popular identity as supplying the basis for culture is at the heart of Chapters 2 and 3: this is because of the easy elision, evident in the work of many writers from this period, between the collective will and the ideal of society as a closed entity whose unity is undisturbed

[22] Cf. Eugenio María de Hostos' account of his travels in South America. Over the course of his travels through South America Hostos, a Puerto Rican, arrived at a conception of Latin America as a vast interconnected space comprising racially varied populations united by common customs and intellectual outlook. This realization came to him as an epiphany after meeting a Peruvian a man described as a 'cholo', a semi-derogatory term for people of mixed Amerindian-mestizo descent, while making the crossing from Panama to Callao. As well as recounting the various positive character traits exhibited by the cholo (modesty, hospitality, unaffectedness), declaring him to represent the 'essential component' of the Peruvian people, Hostos makes the curious observation that he speaks 'con la amable liberalidad de los jíbaros de la patria'—i.e. in the manner of the Puerto Rican peasantry. This suggests that Hostos thought of the cholo as part of a popular demographic substrate found across the whole of Latin America. Eugenio María de Hostos, 'Mi viaje al sur', in *Obras Completas*, 21 vols (Havana: Cultural, 1939-54), vi (1939), pp. 7-437 (pp. 99, 131). My source for this anecdote is the analysis by Richard Rosa, 'Hostos en el mercado: raza y nación en *Mi viaje al sur*', *Revista Iberoamericana*, 63 (1997), 193-208 (pp. 201-2).

by political dissent or racial difference.[23] Organicism of this sort was a hazard which our two thinkers tried to avoid, with varying degrees of success.

Part of the task of the present chapter is to reconstruct the racial dimension of Firmin's criticism of the discourse of confederation. If race is not explicitly addressed in the text, this can partly be attributed to the slippery conceptual framework used to describe the demography of the Americas. As Firmin's recollection indicates, the intellectuals in Paris attributed solidarity between nations both to 'sociological' factors, such as the ease of communication between neighbouring populations, and to the possession of an ethnic 'type' different from 'celui des Anglo-Américains' (LST, 110). Firmin's reference to these concepts points to a new form of race thinking which was gaining currency and which disavowed the old sense of absolute racial difference and Gobineau's obsession with the purity of blood and lineage.[24] Instead, according to the new 'sociological' understanding, race was not purely biological but had a cultural dimension; the demographic composition of society could be managed through the control of migration and studied through the lens of new disciplines such as criminology.[25] If Firmin's criticisms focus on cultural matters rather than race, we should bear in mind that the then-current discourse of culture had merely reconfigured, rather than rejected, older forms of racial determinism. While writers such as Gobineau had treated racial identities as immutable and determined by lineage, sociological discourse treated it as malleable and subject to improvement, even at times advocating mixture to 'improve' the racial stock of the nation.[26] The goal of sociological processes, as we shall see in due course, was the optimal coordination of the body politic so that it functioned as a harmonious organism. Images of organic holism had replaced purity of blood as the privileged organic metaphor.[27] In resisting treating society as an organic whole, Firmin was adopting a position which

[23] George Ciccariello-Maher usefully analyses this opposition to social 'unity' via the work of Georges Sorel, on of the key figures in his genealogy of a 'decolonized dialectic'. See Ciccariello-Maher 2017, pp. 40-1.
[24] Coletta 2018, pp. 48-9.
[25] Ibid, pp. 29-31.
[26] See Thomas E. Skidmore, 'Racial Ideas and Social Policy in Brazil, 1870-1940', in *The Idea of Race in Latin America, 1870-1940*, ed by Thomas E. Skidmore, Aline Helg, and Alan Knight (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1990), pp. 7-36 (p. 24).
[27] For a discussion of blood-lineage and Gobineau, see Young 1995, pp. 113-7. For a discussion of how turn of the twentieth century Argentina nationalism was rooted in a 'organicist' conception of society rather than the more familiar nationalist veneration of the past, see Coletta 2018, pp. 59-60.

potentially differed from Marr. Although Marr disclaimed any crude equation between race and language, he often used organic metaphors to discuss the social roots of culture. In one characteristic instance, he referred to the Near East in the early centuries of Christianity as 'a single cohesive world [odin celostnyj mir]', in which theological difference was harmoniously reconciled within the confines of a discrete cultural milieu.[28] Combined with his view that culture was the product of collective creative processes within individual communities, Marr came perilously close to endorsing the opinion of many of his contemporaries; namely, that 'organic' communities were the source of 'authentic' demotic culture. Chapter 3 will explore how he dealt with the implications of his belief in collective creativity. Chapter 2 will examine what was at stake for Firmin in avoiding this treatment of culture as the product of organic communities: the threat of violently negating Afrodescendants in the name of social cohesion.

Because Firmin expresses reservations over a dominant discourse of cultural identity which he encountered in the context of the Spanish Americas, the *Lettres* warrant comparison with more recent critical assessments of the legacy of turn of the century *latinista* thought. Charles Hatfield's readings of foundational texts of *latinidad* reveal the persistence of a normative concept of identity in writings which have been celebrated and much anthologized for their critique of the presumed cultural universality of Europe and North America. These texts include Rodó's *Ariel*, which equivocates between endorsing ideas because they are universally true or because they are originally and authentically 'one's own', and Martí's celebrated essay 'Nuestra América' (1891), which disavows biological race as the basis of nationhood, but transfers the normative role of race onto culture by admonishing the reader to uphold native custom for fear of betraying the nation.[29] Latin American progressive intellectuals knew that inventing a nation meant yoking together varied and sometimes antagonistic elements within society. These included the potentially recalcitrant criollos—constituting the traditional European ruling elite—alongside mestizos, a numerically dwindling but much mythologized Amerindian cohort, and, in the eyes of some thinkers, Afrodescendants.[30] The intellectuals could take heart,

[28] Marr 1912, p. 71.
[29] Hatfield 2015, pp. 51, 24.
[30] Cf. Magnus Mörner, *Race Mixture in the History of Latin America* (Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1967), pp. 54-6.

however, from the writings of Jules Michelet, who argued (with reference primarily to France) that hybridity need not imperil the nation but could in fact be a source of vigour.[31] A nation which successfully integrated opposing elements was in Michelet's view destined for greatness.[32] Accordingly, proponents of *latinidad* attempted to define national identities which incorporated multiple elements and transformed them into something new—something uniquely American. The result was a new cultural monad which fused and transformed its constituent parts into a new totality. It was endowed with autonomy and a character of its own, which made it possible to differentiate between cultural forms that were appropriate to it and those which were foreign and not to be imitated for fear of 'introduc(ing) a dead organism into a living one by simple implantation.'[33] Fatefully, the emphasis on cohesion—the subordination of all separate constituent identities into the unifying national identity—made it possible to mute struggles for enfranchisement and autonomy which ran in a contrary direction to nationalism.[34] Firmin identified linguistic barriers to Haiti's full participation in a regional confederation, but in reading the *Lettres* we will attempt to map these caveats onto a more troubling but unuttered obstacle to Haiti's ability to be aligned with its neighbours: the question of race.

The demands of post-racial national cohesion were always going to pose a problem for Haiti's admission into the circle of Latin American or Antillean confederation. Haiti was almost always seen peripheral to the project of *latinidad*

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[31] For a discussion of Latin American appropriation and positive re-evaluation of the concept of racial hybridity, including the notion of 'constructive miscegenation' borrowed from Broca, see Nancy Leys Stepan, *The Hour of Eugenics: Race, Gender, and Nation in Latin America* (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 1991), pp. 137-9.

[32] Michelet thought that France's melding of disparate races was part of an organic life process ('Action, réaction; absorption, résorption, voilà le mouvement alternatif d'un véritable organisme.'), which proved the nation's vitality in contrast to Germany and Italy, whose racially pure populations were isolated and still lived in the thrall of nature and their native terrain. Jules Michelet, 'Introduction à l'histoire générale' [1831], in *Œuvres complètes*, ed. by Paul Viallaneix, 21 vols (Paris: Flammarion, 1971-82), II (1972), p. 249, as quoted in Claude Rétat, 'Jules Michelet, l'idéologie vu vivant', *Romantisme. Revue du dix-neuvième siècle*, 130 (2005), 9-22 (p. 13). See also Reynaud-Paligot 2014, pp. 89-91; Mignolo 2005, p. 74.

[33] Rodó [1900] 1988, p. 72.

[34] Although writing about a different and more recent ideological configuration, Ciccariello-Maher's assessment of the perilous myth of cohesion is relevant: 'by asymptotically approaching the inclusion of everyone, we run the risk of sliding into far more treacherous territory, moving from rupture, division, and opposition toward the aspirational recasting of a near-total unity. If anything, *this* is the most ideological gesture of all, one that seeks to reconcile rupture with its opposite, taking refuge in the comforting idea that we are all in this together rather than engaging in risky solidarity *against*.' Ciccariello-Maher 2017, p. 5.

due to racial and linguistic regions: an officially francophone republic whose fellow independent American states were predominantly Spanish speaking, Haiti's powerful historical precedent of black agency and emancipation seemed to defy the racialized hierarchy of civilization which still informed most architects of hemispheric solidarity.[35] The willingness of figures such as Betances to include Haiti prominently in their conceptions of regional confederation were not typical of the movement as a whole. To neighbouring countries, Haiti represented a worrying example of the erosion of white political ascendancy. In Cuba, its presence could be invoked as a negative exemplar of 'racial discord' in order to stymie Afro-Cubans' struggle to obtain, as historian Aline Helg put it, their 'rightful share' of the country's hard-fought sovereignty.[36] Haiti was simultaneously a potent emblem of successful political emancipation—as Firmin put it, 'notre qualité d'aînée des nations indépendantes de l'archipel antillien' (LST, v)—and an outlier within the programme of Caribbean confederation because of the black political agency it embodied and which ran counter to the *latinista* nation-building project.

This chapter explores Firmin's fraught negotiations with the project of Pan-Caribbean confederation, which had held the promise of securing the region's standing in the modern world order, but which was not optimally configured for black emancipation. The *Lettres de Saint-Thomas* record Firmin's thoughts about the project. It is a sometimes frustratingly oblique text. It is arranged in six 'chapters' considering an apparently disparate range of topics, from the rights of foreigners to own property in Haiti, public education, to demographics and historical musings, alongside the more arresting topics of the Antillean Confederation and the French language in Haiti. Each chapter contains an introductory essay followed by one or more letters written by Firmin to a range of individuals in Europe and the Americas.

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[35] Cf. Mignolo 2005, p. 56: 'African Creoles [i.e. the leaders of the Haitian Revolution] had an extra burden upon them. It was easier for Creoles of Spanish and Portuguese descent to be 'recognized' as having a right to independence; but it was not so easy or clear, at the time, to accept that Black people could take their destiny into their own hands.' Consider also Arroyo on one of the formative architects of *antillanismo*: 'As early as the 1860s, sociologist Eugenio maría de Hostos saw in Haiti a strong political ally but discouraged Haitian political choices as a viable model for projects of decolonization in the Spanish Caribbean.' Jossianna Arroyo, *Writing Secrecy in Caribbean Freemasonry* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013), p. 84.

[36] Historian Aline Helg borrows this phrase from Afro-Cuban civil-rights discourse and applies it to her account of struggle for racial equality in the face of a nationalist discourse which proclaimed that this equality had already been achieved, making it 'blasphemous for Afro-Cubans to proclaim both their blackness and their patriotism.' Aline Helg, *Our Rightful Share: The Afro-Cuban Struggle for Equality, 1886-1919* (Chapel Hill, NC, and London: University of North Carolina Press, 1995), p. 7.

It is sometimes difficult to parse out an underlying thesis from Firmin's display of erudition and the niceties of epistolary civility in which he expresses himself. However, a coherent thesis on nation-building and cultural diffusion can be gleaned by focusing on two sections. In the section entitled 'Haïti et la Confédération Antillienne', Firmin expresses admiration for the idea of regional federation despite the historical events which intervened to make this a distant prospect. However, while regretting that fortuitous factors caused the project to fail, he subtly casts doubt on the teleology with which regional political union was endowed. Thinkers such as Torres Caicedo regarded such a union as the inevitable consequences of 'natural' processes (as the expression of an 'idée naturelle' or a 'loi historique'); others, as we shall see, interpreted national and transnational consolidation as the outcome of process of fusion occurring latently within society.[37] Firmin expresses scepticism over this teleology and instead proposes a constructivist view of politics and culture, in which identity is regarded not as immanently existent among the masses, but rather something to be engineered. This reflects the position he adopted in *De l'Égalité* according to which individuals—typically men of genius—have the power to intervene decisively in history. Firmin's constructivism amounts to a rejection of the *latinista*—and to a large extent *antillanista*—belief in the 'natural' or 'organic' basis of culture and the transformative hybridity by which American nations were imagined as having generated their new and distinct cultures. This imagined process of social cohesion had the utopian aim of abolishing racism by transcending racial difference, but in practical terms could lead to devastating consequences for Afrodescendants. Firmin's brief tenure as Haitian ambassador in Cuba, recounted in this section, exposed him to these negative consequences of Caribbean nation building. Grasping their full implications requires that we look beyond the text to other biographical evidence, and that we reconstruct the discursive environment in Cuba within which Firmin's presence was interpreted.

Finally, we will look at the section entitled 'Haïti et la langue française', in which Firmin's constructivist vision of cultural identity can be gauged. In this section he addresses the question of what it meant for Haiti to be, in his terms, 'Afro-Latin': not fully aligned culturally with its Latin American neighbours, in peril of

[37] The citations from Torres Caicedo occur in reports by the Paris police which placed the Union latino-américaine. Streckert 2013, p. 202.

falling into cultural dependency on the old colonial metropole, in need of pragmatic and decidedly non-organicist cultural planning. Out of this sense of the awkward cultural and geopolitical negotiations facing Haiti, Firmin begins sketching a theory of language and culture as lacking any fixed basis in ethno-national 'reality'. This marks a contrast with many of his contemporaries who viewed the popular masses, and the latent processes of cultural and ethnic consolidation unfolding at their stratum of society, as the sole legitimate basis of national culture. Writers of Firmin's generation in the Spanish Americas, as we shall see, could claim that Spanish had a legitimate hold in the Americas because it was one of the constituent parts of the cultural organism embodied in their societies: although the Americas had broken off from the former colonial metropole, the cultural amalgam of their societies was compatible with the claim of partial genealogical descent from Spain.[38] Firmin had no recourse to this argument because it was based in an organicist vision of society as a harmonious whole whose disparate parts worked in concert. By choosing not to make genealogical descent a basis for linguistic legitimacy, Firmin paralleled Marr, who argued that Georgian was a legitimate 'international' lingua franca for the Caucasus precisely because it was not the creation of 'the offspring of a single Georgian tribe' but had been used and adapted by many different 'nations' of the Caucasus over the centuries.[39]

## 2.2 Confederation and its Discontents

Firmin's prefatory recollections of his involvement with the movement for Caribbean confederation are full of admiration for its ideals and affection for its leaders; however, what he narrates is a story of failure.

Firmin acknowledges the strengths of the *latinista* and *antillanista* movements in allowing fraternity and shared ideals to triumph over narrowly national identification. Paris drew a circle of 'hommes d'élite' (LST, 116) from Cuba, Puerto Rico, and South and Central America who, as Firmin notes, arrived at this convivial circle of intellectual exchange sometimes under circumstances of

[38] See below, p. 141, f. 139 on Rubén Darío.
[39] Marr 1922b, p. 14. On Marr's opposition to Georgian nationalism, see Cherchi and Manning 2002.

exile. The French capital was an important node in a trans-national web of affiliations which stretched between Europe and the Americas. Membership of this circle of likeminded spirits couched individual national identity within a broader regional sense of solidarity. Firmin foregrounds Torres Caicedo in this regard as a consummate 'patriote hispano-américain', who spoke in support of causes that affected any number of countries in Latin America (LST, 111). Firmin's words echo Torres Caicedo's remarks that his fraternal society of Americanists should be a place 'où nous ne serons ni Péruviens, ni Boliviens, ni Argentins, ni Dominicains, ni Haïtiens […] mais où nous serons tous Latino-Américains!'[40] As Firmin recalls, the society debated the form that a future confederation should take and the role of the nation-state within it. One option, a 'confédération constitutionnelle et positive', would see a high degree of integration among the member states and the establishment of an administrative capital, 'dont l'action unificatrice soutiendrait, en un faisceau patriotique, leurs divers intérêts matériels et moraux, en y projetant l'esprit d'ordre et de progrès raisonné, maintenu par la discipline administrative et l'uniformité juridique'. This programme suggests the partial integration of national interests within a common project; indeed, Firmin's 'faisceau' or *fasces* evokes the Roman ideal of centralized authority—an idea with unfortunate later resonances but with a different symbolic value in the history of South American independence.[41] The alternative was the 'organisation amphyctionique', a looser union of all those 'jeunes nations américaines appartenant à un type ethnique différent de celui des Anglo-Américains' (LST, 110). This model also had its roots in classical antiquity, in the union of Greek states, although it was later applied by Simón Bolívar to the union of independent Latin American states he proposed at the Congress of Panama in 1826.[42] Although Bolívar's vision did not come to pass, the Congress of Panama represented an ambitious attempt to forge an anti-colonial union among American republics.[43] Bolívar's federalist project was an ideological precursor to Torres

[40] Ibid, pp. 202-3 (again from a police report).
[41] The *fasces* were adopted in the coat of arms of Gran Colombia at the Congress of Cúcuta in 1821. Ramón Azpurúa, *Biografias de Hombres Notables de Hispano-América*, 4 vols (Caracas: Imprenta Nacional, 1877), iv, p. x.
[42] Gerald E. Fitzgerald, 'Introduction' to *The Political thought of Bolivar*, ed. Gerald E. Fitzgerald (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1977), pp. 1-9 (pp. 4-5).
[43] Although, in a decision indicative of the difficulties Firmin would encounter, Bolívar did not invite Haiti to the Congress because he saw the republic as racially and culturally incompatible with the Spanish Americas. See Marie Arana, *Bolívar: The Epic Life of the Man Who Liberated South America* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 2013), p.353.

Caicedo and his circle, and the influence of the *Libertador* is visible at other key points in Firmin's text.

Moreover, Firmin's account offers a glimpse of a more radical alternative version of internationalism which emphasized Afro-Antillean solidarity. After the death of Torres Caicedo, Firmin recalls, Betances took the lead, and the project of confederation became refocused around the liberation of Cuba and Puerto Rico and the formation of a *Caribbean* rather than *Latin American* union. The new plan took in a smaller geographical range, comprising countries lacking 'une puissance capable de se faire respecter au dehors' but whose populations are engaged in 'le contact fréquent, facile et continu' necessary for an effective political federation (LST, 113). Haiti's position within this political structure is not spelled out precisely, although Firmin is proud to note that he was sometimes thought of as a future leader of the confederation (LST, 116). Firmin writes admiringly of the many 'personalités éminentes' he knew in Paris, but he reserves particular fondness for Betances. The Puerto Rican shared Firmin's 'idées de progrès et de réhabilitation de la race noire' (LST, 115). Indeed, Betances distinguished himself from other *antillanistas* through the centrality he accorded to the political agency of Afrodescendants. He had rediscovered and embraced his own black ancestry, and this shaped his political vision: he regarded transnational black and mulatto solidarity as an essential factor in securing independence for Puerto Rico and Cuba, and uniquely among many of his contemporaries saw Haiti as a positive political antecedent.[44] Such was his moral charisma that Firmin likens the gathering of mourners around his deathbed as 'la "veillée d'armes" imposée, durant le moyen âge, aux futurs chevaliers' (LST, 118). This striking image underlines the importance for the movement of the personal friendship between the men who led it.[45] Its members idealized the moral qualities of self-sacrifice and brotherly solidarity which Betances exemplified.

This passage from the *Lettres* displays a rhetorical and thematic similarity to other Afro-Antillean political writings which constructed an imagined political

[44] Reyes-Santos 2015, pp. 39-40.
[45] 'For Caribbean elite subjects like Firmin, Henríquez y Carvajal, and Betances, the rhetoric of sympathy and fraternal love served to shape social networks where affect and politics often became indivisible.' Chaar-Perez 2013, p. 26. Freemasonry, of which several of these thinkers were exponents, 'encouraged liberal and secular ideals that came directly from Enlightenment philosophers and the French Revolution' and helped form 'a transnational and transatlantic 'fraternal' alliance.' Arroyo 2013, p. 15.

community built around selfless brotherly assistance.[46] Black and mulatto politicians viewed their own actions as chapters within an unfolding narrative of transnational cooperation stretching back in time. One of the earliest events on the timeline was the assistance rendered to Bolívar by the Haitian president Alexandre Pétion at a time when the former had failed to find support from the British in his fight against Spain. Firmin recounted this episode in *De l'Égalité* (for him it illustrated the degree to which 'ce petit peuple, composé de fils d'Africains, a influé sur l'histoire générale du monde, depuis son indépendance') in what was perhaps also a reference to Betances' speeches praising Pétion, a mulatto like himself, as the true leader of the Haitian Revolution.[47] More recent events were also celebrated as showing Pan-Caribbean cooperation in securing freedom. These included two uprisings of 1868, the Grito de Lares in Puerto Rico and the Grito de Yara in Cuba, both of which were organized by Betances and the Dominican Gregorio Luperón, a figure who espoused a racially-conscious version of *antillanismo* and who was himself of Haitian ancestry.[48] Firmin played a part in the counter-history of Afro-Antillean emancipation on at least one occasion: in 1889, despite the Haitian government's pledge to Spain to remain neutral over Cuban affairs, Firmin received the renowned Afro-Cuban general Antonio Maceo, who was then in exile, and lavished praise upon him.[49] Betances arguably set the tone for this spirit of transnational assistance, encapsulated in his political rallying cry 'las Antillas para los Antillanos'.[50] In his writings he built a canon of exemplary Afro-Antillean figures, including the Haitian Alexandre Pétion, in a manner suggestive of a new historical consciousness at odds with nationalism.[51]

However, Firmin's account poignantly turns to the movement's collapse following the events of 1898, the year that the Spanish Empire ceased to exist.[52] The

[46] For an analysis of the symbolism of Firmin's depiction of Betances' deathbed, see Chaar-Perez 2013, pp. 12-13.
[47] Firmin 1885, p. 585; Chaar-Perez 2013, pp. 14-5 ; Arroyo 2013, p. 98.
[48] Reyes-Santos 2015, pp. 39, 45. For the consecration of the Grito de Lares as a moment of hemispheric revolutionary struggle, see Toledo 2000, p. 25. See also Arroyo 2013, pp. 90-1.
[49] Jean Victor Geneaus, 'Joseph Antenor Firmin: Un gigante de nuestro Caribe', in *Haití: Una herida palpitante: Un enfoque histórico sobre su realidad* (Santo Domingo: Movimiento Izquierda Unida, 2012), pp. 92-102 (p. 97); for details of Maceo's banishment and return to Cuba, see Helg 1995, pp. 50-1.
[50] Reyes-Santos 2015, p. 40.
[51] Ibid, pp. 32, 42.
[52] This was a pivotal year for the fate of Latin America and arguably supplied the impetus for Rodó's *Ariel*. Hatfield 2015, p. 33.

Cuban War of Independence had been well underway at this point, and Spain made concessions which included granting the island self-government.[53] However, the United States interceded in the conflict when the USS *Maine*, which had been sent to Cuba to safeguard American interests on the island, mysteriously exploded and sank in Havana harbour. This was the pretext for the Spanish-American War, which was conducted, in the words of President McKinley as quoted by Firmin, 'au nom de l'humanité' (LST, 117). Spain's defeat, and the crowning of the US as the new regional power, brought about not the hoped-for independence for Cuba, but rather a period of political subordination. Hopes of Puerto Rican independence suffered an even worse defeat with the island being formally ceded to the US—an event which, Firmin recounts, crushed Betances's spirit and hastened his death (LST, 118). Firmin concludes his account by stating that the events of 1898, the death of Martí at the Battle of Dos Rios three years prior, and numerous other hardships 'avaient graduellement diminué mon enthousiasme même théorique' (LST, 119) for the project of regional confederation.

Firmin's account of the failure of *antillanismo* through US military intervention would seem to leave the ideal of confederation intact, allowing it to stand as a symbol for an alternative world. Antillean internationalism has been recently revisited and assessed as a decolonial project which attempted to articulate 'an alternative political formation to the unitary sovereign nation-state', notwithstanding the project's various 'blind spots' and its failure to generate this form of sovereignty in practice.[54] Similarly, J. Michael Dash has praised Firmin's commitment to Pan-Caribbean internationalism for offering a cosmopolitan alternative to the populist and nationalist ideologies which dominated Haitian politics through much of the twentieth century.[55] However, Firmin's *Lettres* raise doubts about the project of Caribbean confederation that go beyond the fortuitous course of historical events and affect the very ideals upon which it was built. These doubts are raised obliquely in his epistolary exchange with one of the movement's members which will study in the next section. They centre on the movement's sense

[53] Helg 1995, p. 89.
[54] Martínez-San Miguel and Seligmann, 2020, p. 42. Tellingly, one of these blind spots was 'the hegemonic elision of the black creole foundation that linked the Spanish Caribbean with Haiti to privilege a white creole imaginary'. Ibid, pp. 39-40.
[55] Dash 2004, pp. 50, 52.

of its own teleology. The ideologues of *antillanismo* believed that their movement would succeed because they saw confederation as the inevitable and natural culmination of a process of demographic and cultural consolidation already underway in the Caribbean region. Firmin suggests obliquely that this confidence was misplaced; his letter questions the naturalism of *antillanismo* and its ideal of racial hybridization as the cornerstone for the new American nation.

The exchange of letters can be read as a debate between two positions: Firmin's interlocutor, who expresses the widely held view that the confederation and the nations it comprises emerged 'naturally' out of a process of cultural and 'sociological' consolidation, and Firmin's own view, which could be termed constructivist: Firmin thought that collective identity was not the starting point for the formation of states and transnational alliances, but rather a consequence of formulations made by the political and intellectual elites.

Understanding these positions more fully requires first delving into the discursive context of the debate. Taking inspiration from the natural sciences, many proponents of *antillanismo* and *latinidad* thought societies followed a typical developmental trajectory which included processes of confluence and hybridity in which separate elements are harmoniously reconciled with one another. This belief reflects their democratic political commitment to bringing as many elements as possible into the political sphere from within societies that had historically been strictly hierarchical. Yet their discursive positions were largely predetermined by the long and uneven development of political enfranchisement in the Americas and the many ideological obfuscations which leaders had used when attempting to speak for the nation as a whole. The *latinista* and *antillanista* conception of an ethnically hybrid society was not sharply differentiated from earlier ideologies which arose as a means of accommodating different segments of the hierarchized colonial society which gained political enfranchisement through the struggle for national independence. The first major extension of the franchise came during the wars of independence at the start of the nineteenth century when criollos (the 'legitimate' American Spaniards) co-opted the 'illegitimate' mestizos in the struggle against Spain.[56] This did not abolish the criollo elite position but allowed for a progressive

[56] Mörner 1967, pp. 55, 86.

assimilation of mestizos into elite positions.[57] Over the course of the century myths of nationhood arose. The very 'idea' of Latin America ('Latinidad'), as argued by Mignolo, was an identity invented by elites which allowed them to 'restore' European culture as a normative national culture, while in practice marginalizing Indian and Afrodescendant segments of society.[58] These same elites invented the concept of *mestizaje* to describe the emergence of the nation out of a beneficent racial mixture which erased internal difference and, in some iterations, brought about the 'whitening' of the population.[59] *Antillanismo* has typically been seen as marking a rupture with the elite creole project of nation building.[60] While this may have been true of the intellectual work of Betances, other important *antillanistas* such as Eugenio María de Hostos pursued what has been described as 'a romanticized, nostalgic aspiration for a culturally and racially homogeneous society in a collapsing world threatened by modernization.'[61] Thinkers such as Hostos mythologized certain ethnic types, in the form of mixed-race peasants, as the embodiment of Americanness.[62] The ideal of the 'harmonious' post-racial society survived many ideological and political shifts in the nineteenth century.

Firmin was not immune from national mythologizing, and in writing about Haitian society he sometimes glossed over the country's internal racial antagonisms. Racial segregation in Haiti took the form of 'mulatto privilege';[63] the roots of the division could be traced back to the Revolution and the co-opting by the *affranchis* (the free people of colour) of the fighting power of the enslaved.[64] Firmin diagnosed it as a form of prejudice which could be overcome through education, as he put it in *De l'Égalité*: 'il faut donc attendre que l'instruction, répandue sans réserve dans les masses, vienne enfin refouler et anéantir tous ces préjuges qui sont pour le progrès

[57] Ibid, p. 89.
[58] Mignolo 2005, pp. 58-9.
[59] Ibid, p. 136; Reyes-Santos 2015, p. 34.
[60] Mignolo characterizes Marti's political vision for the Americas, as expressed in 'Nuestra América', as a 'dissenting project' which broke from the dominant creole ideology. Mignolo 2005, p. 45.
[61] Ernesto Sagás, *Race and Politics in the Dominican Republic* (Gainesville: University of Florida Press, 2000), p. 37.
[62] Dominican elites promoted a 'romanticized notion of the campesino cibaeño [i.e. peasants from the Cibao region] and small-scale production as symbols not of the actual Dominican Republic but of what the elites wanted it to be.' Ibid, p. 37.
[63] Arroyo 2013, p. 3;
[64] Patrick Bellegarde-Smith, 'Resisting Freedom: Cultural Factors in Democracy—the case for Haiti', in *Vodou in Haitian Life and Culture: Invisible Powers*, ed. by Claudine Michel and Patrick Bellegarde-Smith (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2006), pp. 100-115 (p. 105).

comme une pierre d'achoppement'.[65] Treating these racial tensions as merely an error of judgment among the popular classes, the consequence of 'les plus sots préjugés' engendered by 'la doctrine de l'ingégalité des races', does not acknowledge the root causes of social inequality. Firmin's view that racial antagonism could be overcome by removing logical fallacies and errors of judgement from the minds of the citizenry was doubtless overly optimistic. What is significant, however, is that Firmin was not advocating a post-racial society in which racial difference, and therefore racial antagonism, ceases to exist by being 'bred out'. Equally, he did not expect the masses to supply the guiding principle of identification; instead, he thought identity would first need to be conjured into being by the intellectual elites. Firmin's constructivist approach to achieving national identity distinguishes him from many of his contemporaries; the letter format of his last text allowed him to express his position from within the thicket of prevailing discourse.

## 2.3 Epistolary Politics

Letter writing had an illustrious history in Latin American political theory. It was in the form of a published letter that Simón Bolívar formulated some of his best-known opinions concerning the construction of collective identity in the independent American nation. In 1815, having been forced into temporary exile in Jamaica and living in straitened circumstances, Bolívar wrote a reply to an unknown Englishman who had asked his opinions about the future of the Spanish Americas which was published three years later in a Jamaican newspaper.[66] In the 'Carta de Jamaica' (Jamaica Letter) as the frequently anthologized text came to be known, Bolívar addressed themes that were on Firmin's mind almost a century later. These included the proper balance between idealism and pragmatism in state building, the importance of popular political will in legitimizing the state, the role of providence in history, and the need for a collective identity capable of reconciling differences within society. The 'Carta' displayed Bolívar's pragmatism in not seeking to 'adopt

[65] Firmin 1885, p. xiv.
[66] Arana 2013, pp. 175-7.

the best system of government, but the one that is most likely to succeed.'[67] Specifically, he argued that the Spanish Americas were ill-suited to either monarchy or democracy but needed strong and enlightened leaders.[68] In a famous passage addressing the constructed nature of political entities, Bolívar explained that national liberation movements in the Americas are complicated because they cannot claim to speak for everyone simultaneously:

> we are, moreover, neither Indian nor European, but a species midway between the legitimate proprietors of this country and the Spanish usurpers. In short, though Americans by birth we derive our rights from Europe, and we have to assert these rights against the rights of the natives, and at the same time we must defend ourselves against the invaders.[69]

Although the 'Carta' has been read as a foundational text in the myth of mestizaje, Bolívar is strikingly candid in admitting that it may be impossible to reconcile everybody's rights and freedoms within the nation.[70] In the *Lettres de Saint-Thomas*, itself a document born of exile, and his letter to a contemporary Dominican gentleman, Firmin expresses a Bolivarian sense of constructivism and an awareness of the perils of assuming that the state can derive its legitimacy from a pre-existing sense of solidarity among the populace.

In contrast to Bolívar's unnamed 'English gentleman', Firmin's exchange is with a named individual: a certain 'F. Carvajal' who wrote to him from Cuba in 1905, who turns out to have been the Dominican intellectual Federico Henríquez y Carvajal.[71] Carvajal had been a supporter from afar of Martí and was a close

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[67] Simón Bolívar, 'Reply of a South American to a Gentleman of this Island' [1815], in *Selected Writings of Bolivar*, ed. by Harold A. Bierck, 2 vols (New York: The Colonial Press, 1951), i, pp. 103-122 (p. 119).
[68] Arana 2013, p. 176.
[69] Bolívar [1815], p. 110.
[70] Mörner argues that Bolívar 'displayed a romantically pro-Indian attitude' in the Carta and that 'he took the historical fact of mestizaje as the point of departure for the political and constitutional theorizing that fills most of the document'; it was only later, so Mörner argues, that Bolívar came to acknowledge his 'fears and guilt with regard to colored people.' Mörner1967, pp. 86-7. By contrast, Vallega portrays the duality of Bolívar's thought at this point in the Carta de Jamaica as a 'double displacement': 'On the one hand, the revolutions and the foundation of the American nations are grounded on European ideals. As Bolívar's sharp analysis points out, this means asserting the European founded rights— the ideals of freedom, liberty, and equality that distinguish the Enlightenment with respect to the development of rationalism in the name of human freedom— over those of the natives. On the other hand, the Americans wage a war against the European invaders.' Alejandro Arturo Vallega, *Latin American Philosophy from Identity to Radical Exteriority* (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 2014), p. 21.
[71] Identified as such by Chaar-Perez (2014, p. 26).

associate of Hostos during the latter's period of exile in Santo Domingo. In his letter Carvajal introduces himself to Firmin as a representative of a group of Caribbean expatriates residing in Cuba who seek to revive the ideals of Confederation so cherished by earlier generations of *antillanistas* (LST, 120).[72] Despite being Firmin's senior by two years, Carvajal addresses him in the tone of a young proselyte seeking advice from an elder statesman. Exceptionally for the *Lettres*, Firmin includes Carvajal's letter, translated into French, before following it with his reply.[73] Thus, we are able to observe Firmin's discursive positioning in fine detail.

In seeking support for a revival of the 'Confédération antillienne' as conceived by Hostos and Martí (LST, 120), Carvajal appeals to Firmin's Antillean patriotism, addressing him flatteringly as 'l'une de nos plus hautes personalités' (LST, 121). Carvajal explains that he and his circle wish to bring about 'un État de toutes les îles antilliennes', a state ambitiously meant to encompass the entire 'famille des Lucayes et des Caraïbes' from the Bahamas to the Lesser Antilles, incorporating parts of the anglophone Caribbean such as Jamaica which were never part of the original confederation (LST, 122). Carvajal acknowledges that the project is ambitious and that *antillanismo* had major setbacks; however, he expresses conviction that the noble ideal behind this 'projet civilisateur' had historical antecedents in the liberation struggles of the Spanish Americas and in the history of Haiti (LST, 123). Above all, Carvajal is confident in the project because the idea of the confederation, as it was revealed to Hostos and Martí and conveyed in their 'évangile écrit', is 'née des profondes considérations sur les préceptes immuables de la sociologie en relation avec la géographie, la nature des races, les contrées et l'histoire des peuples distincts qui forment l'archipel colombien' (LST, 120-1).

Carvajal places great faith in the eventual emergence of a Caribbean Confederation because providence—or, rather, the laws of nature—will that it should exist. He invokes the 'patrie antillienne' as a latently existing entity which is subjugated by its present-day 'esclavage politique' but must merely await the proper time to break through 'l'ancien et insuffisant moule' (LST, 121-3) of inherited

[72] Carlos Bosch García, 'Federico Henríquez y Carvajal, (1848-1952)', *Revista de Historia de América*, 34 (1952), 549-552 (p. 550); José del Castillo Pichardo, 'Hostos en Santo Domingo: periplo de un iluminado', *CLÍO* 196 (2018), 117-152 (pp. 126-7).
[73] Firmin explains that he misplaced Carvajal's letter before finally sending his reply two years later which was returned to sender (119-20).

political structures. His faith in 'immutable' sociological laws ('les préceptes immuables de la sociologie') places nationhood and state-formation firmly within the realm of the natural sciences. Carvajal's letter reflects widely held views on regional confederation and *antillanismo*. Torres Caicedo, as we saw above, viewed a Latin American union as the inevitable outcome of historical law. Hostos' major work of political philosophy, his *Tratado de Sociología*, had been published posthumously the year before Carvajal wrote his letter to Firmin. In it, Hostos formulated a set of laws governing the development of society which he treated as equivalent to the drives governing self-preservation and bodily integrity in the individual, both sets of principles being subordinate to the law of Nature.[74] Hostos regarded racial hybridity as a powerful force for national consolidation in Latin America and argued that the process was being driven by the mestizos. Mixed race individuals for Hostos represented 'el conjunto de fuerzas físicas y morales de las razas madres'; collectively, they embodied the future of Latin American society.[75] Their individual racial identity was a microcosmic recapitulation of the grand 'cruzamientos' ('crossings') unfolding in America.[76] Judged solely on the basis of his letter, Carvajal was perhaps less of a biological determinist than Hostos; however, both thought that, in order to be legitimate, political structures must be grounded in 'natural' demographic processes. For Carvajal, the crucial demographic process was the emergence of collective consciousness allowing groups of people to identify with one another. Carvajal casts himself in the role of an assistant to an unfolding process of political identification already at work in the mass of the Caribbean population. The job for intellectuals such as him and Firmin is merely to facilitate this by awaking 'la conscience edormie des pays dont la liberté constitue déjà notre culte'

[74] See his 'Ley de Conservación' which in the individual applies to 'la integridad de su vida material' and in society 'se refiere a la integridad de la vida material, volitiva y afectiva de la Humanidad.' Eugenio María de Hostos, *Tratado de Sociología* (Madrid: Bailly-Ballière é hijos, 1904), pp. 228-229. Cf. Adriana Arpini, 'La 'sociología' de Eugenio María de Hostos', *Hostos: sentido y proyección de su obra en América: ponencias presentadas en el Primer Encuentro Internacional sobre el pensamiento de Eugenio María de Hostos durante los días 2 al 7 de abril de 1989* (San Juan: Instituto de Estudios Hostosianos, Universidad de Puerto Rico, 1995), pp. 667-705.
[75] Eugenio María de Hostos, 'El Cholo' [1870], in *Obras completas*, vii (1939), pp. 152-5 (p. 153). A sociological type that Hostos repeatedly foregrounded in his writings was the 'cholo', a semi-derogatory term for individuals of mixed Amerindian-mestizo descent (cf. Mörner 1967, p. 102). Hostos viewed the cholo in highly favourable terms, as an embodiment of futurity: 'Para mí, el cholo no es un hombre, no es un tipo, no es el ejemplar de la raza; es todo eso, más una cuestión social de porvenir.' Hostos [1870] 1939, p. 154. The cholo appears in another famous anecdotes related in his travel writing as discussed above, p. 107 f. 22, citing Rosa 1997, pp. 200-4.
[76] Hostos [1870] 1939, p. 153.

(LST, 122). The long-awaited outcome would be a union founded in 'un lien indissoluble […] d'amour réciproque'.

Replying to Carvajal offers Firmin an opportunity to adopt the posture of a wise elder statesman. He does this by sounding a note of caution born out of long experience with bitter political realities: the confederation is a worthy cause, but 'les aspirations que manifestent cette idée sont aussi difficiles à réaliser qu'elles sont élevées et nobles' (LST, 128). Firmin appreciates the importance of solidarity between Cuba, Haiti, and the Dominican Republic, in order to maintain their sovereignty, and grants that by uniting their 'destinées nationales', these three countries may in time cause their smaller neighbours to gravitate towards them. This would eventually produce 'un État consistent, habile à se maintenir par soi-même'. However, geopolitical factors make this a distant prospect. Firmin refers to Cuba's tribulations in recent years, which he terms 'une période de tâtonnement national' (LST, 129). In 1906, in the period between Carvajal's letter and Firmin's reply, a protest movement comprising both white and Afro-Cubans coalesced around the leader of the Liberal party José Miguel Gómez in opposition to the Estrada Palma regime.[77] This 'Liberal rebellion' brought about a second US occupation which lasted until 1909, in accordance with the American right to intervene in Cuba during times of civil unrest that was written into the country's constitution.[78] Firmin also cautions that the islands of the Lesser Antilles, including Guadeloupe, Martinique, and Dutch possessions, may be unable to 'conserver une organisation constitutionnelle, en dehors de toute tutelle administrative d'une métropole extérieure' (LST, 130).

If we delve into the intertextual references in Carvajal's letter and Firmin's reply, we can discern a critique on Firmin's part which goes beyond the political feasibility of the confederation and calls into question its philosophical basis and the imagined collective identity from which it derived its legitimacy. The epistolary exchange is mediated by a text by Rodó which is not acknowledged explicitly by either Carvajal or Firmin but which both were likely to have read.[79] Rodó argued that

[77] Helg 1995, pp. 137-8.
[78] Ibid, p. 98.
[79] The decade of 1905-15 arguably marked the pinnacle of Rodó's influence across Latin America. Hatfield 2015, pp. 32-3. Rodó's thought was introduced to the Caribbean by the Dominican intellectuals Pedro and Max Henríquez Ureña and was much discussed in Cuban literary circles

Latin America formed 'una grande e imperecedera unidad', and that it manifested a collective cultural identity that transcended the borders of the individual nations that it comprised.[80] This identity, Rodó argued, was no figment of the imagination but existed latently within the beliefs and practices of the popular masses. It was the product of a 'viva armonía de naciones vinculadas por todos los lazos de la tradición, de la raza, de las instituciones, del idioma […].'[81] It is possible to see a connection between Rodó's theory of a latent Latin American transnational identity and Carvajal's faith in the ability of sociological consolidation to generate a unifed Antillean identity as described by Hostos. In his letter to Firmin, Carvajal appealed to the ideal of a shared identity in 'notre patrie antillienne' (LST, 120). Firmin reciprocated this sentiment in his reply to Carvajal by referring to 'cet archipel des Antilles, que nous pouvons considerer, dès aujourd'hui, comme notre *plus grande patrie*' (LST, 130). This italicised phrase is a likely an allusion to Rodó's essay of 1905 which coined the term 'máxima patria' to describe the ideal of a supra-national Latin American cultural identity.[82] However, Firmin is in fact precisely rejecting the belief that regional identity stems from pre-existing popular sentiments. Indeed, he counsels Carvajal that the aspirations which underpin the ideal of the Confederation may only be shared by a few individuals initially:

> Aussi bien, pour qu'elles triomphent et se traduisent en fait tangible, il faut une longue, constante et sainte propagande de ceux qui sont animés du feu sacré d'un patriotisme large, intelligent et prévoyant (LST, 128).

Firmin acknowledges that while he and Carvajal, as members of an intellectual elite, may consider themselves part of a *magna patria*, this mode of identification does not stem from the beliefs of the masses. To gain traction it would need to be inculcated in the masses over time. Similarly, Firmin concludes his letter by cautioning Carvajal that his ideal is admirable but that 'sa réalisation pratique réclame une longue gestation de l'idée inspiratrice, facilitée par une heureuse évolution des éléments humains appelés à s'en pénétrer' (LST, 130). In Firmin's view, there is no

during the precise period of Firmin's last stay on the island. Cf. Gustavo San Román, 'La recepción de Rodó en Cuba', *Revista de la Biblioteca Nacional* (Montevideo) 1.3 (2009), 71-86.
[80] José Enrique Rodó, 'La Vuelta de Juan Carlos Gómez' [1905], *Obras completas*, ed. by Monegal (1967), pp. 509-514 (p. 513); also quoted by Robert Patrick Newcomb, *Nossa and Nuestra América: Inter-American Dialogues* (West Lafayette, Indiana: Purdue University Press, 2012), pp. 66-7.
[81] Rodó [1905], p. 513; as quoted by Newcomb 2012, p. 68.
[82] Newcomb 2012, p. 68.

slumbering consciousness waiting to be awoken and the elites, of which he and Carvajal are members face a formidable task of nation building.[83] The absence of even a latent collective identity would have profound implications for the *latinista* and *antillanista* claim of deriving cultural legitimacy from popular beliefs of the masses.

Additionally, Firmin's reply to Carvajal raises the troubling question of whether a regional Confederation would address racial inequalities or whether it would push them to one side. It was an article of faith for the ideologues and theorists of Caribbean and Latin American confederation that trans-national identity would replace and transcend distinct racial identities. This was true of Torres Caicedo who thought, to quote from Firmin's paraphrase, that the 'jeunes nations américaines' collectively manifested 'un type ethnique différent de celui des Anglo-Américains' (LST, 110). Carvajal's concept of a common Antillean 'patrie' likewise evokes the idea of a transcendent axis of identification. Such a supra-national entity may have held the promise of abolishing prejudice founded in racial and national difference. Yet a hasty proclamation that racial identities are rendered obsolete by the confederation could risk delegitimizing the efforts of marginalized communities to obtain equal rights in the name of racial equality. On the one hand, Firmin seems to echo Carvajal by desiring to promote a 'réelle et puissante sympathie entre les Antilliens, en dehors et au-dessus de toutes les distinctions de race, d'origine et de nationalité' (LST, 130). On the other hand, Firmin is referring to this sense of 'sympathie' as something which has not yet been achieved. He implies, perhaps, that the existing states out of which Carvajal hopes to constitute a confederation have not overcome the legacy of racial prejudice. In his letter of reply, Firmin refers to an obstacle to constituting a union in the form of

[83] We can discern further intertextual references to Rodó in Firmin's letter. In *Ariel*, a text published the same year as Carvajal's letter, Rodó had described the diffusion of ideas through the 'genio de la propaganda'—another phrase with echoes in Firmin's reply (Rodó 1900b, p. 221; quoted by Hatfield 2015, p. 40). Yet Rodó went further than simply claiming that ideas gain traction because of their 'universalidad' (1900b, p. 221; quoted by Hatfield 2015, p. 40). Rather, he argued that certain ideas catch on in certain cultures when they affirm national distinctiveness. One of the core arguments of *Ariel* is that 'we have a heritage of race, a great ethnic tradition (to) maintain.' 1900a, p. 73; quoted by Hatfield 2015, p. 43. In choosing not to ground culture and statehood in a pre-existing 'natural' ethno-national identity, Firmin sets himself apart from the discourse of *latinidad* and its influence on *antillanismo.*

> le peu de consistance sociologique qu'on rencontre dans les groupements politiques, même au sein des Antilles depuis longtemps constituées en Etats indépendants, telles que Haïti et la République dominicaine, sans rien dire de Cuba […] (LST, 129).

The concept of 'sociological' consistency is ambiguous and could refer to different things in different countries.[84] However, his reference to Cuba specifically calls to mind one of the most pressing issues which the young republic was facing: the integration of Afro-Cubans within the newly constituted nation-state. The prevailing consensus view held that national independence and the extension of legal equality to all citizens had resolved the 'race problem' once and for all.[85] Experience showed otherwise, and Firmin was later to gain first-hand exposure to racial politics in Cuba. Elsewhere in this section of the *Lettres*, Firmin reflected on his experience arriving in Havana as the Haitian ambassador in 1909:

> Ce fut pour moi une agréable révélation de rencontrer à la Havane un élan de sympathie et d'admiration qui paraîtrait démentir la légende d'une répulsion dédaigneuse du blanc cubain pour tous les individus ayant dans les veines même une parcelle de sang africain. Je suis absolument noir, et, pourtant, je reçus dans la capitale de Cuba une bienvenue enthousiaste que n'égala celle d'aucun autre diplomate arrivé en ce pays (LST, 124).

Firmin's emphatic disavowal of racial prejudice upon his arrival in Cuba at the same time cannot avoid calling to mind the persistence of this prejudice in a historically highly racialized society, a phenomenon which impacted his stay in the country despite his welcoming initial reception. The persistence of prejudice would undermine the claim that transnational unity, and the nation-state structures upon which it was thought to rest, could magically resolve racial inequalities.

Before we turn to Firmin's stay in Cuba, and in order to grasp the tensions between nationhood and racial equality, we must first address one final voice from within the discursive thicket of the time: José Martí. The apostle of the revolution,

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[84] When discussing Haiti elsewhere in the *Lettres*, Firmin uses it to refers to sociological integration in the context of education. He advocates expanding the public school system to bring about 'une harmonisation sociologique entre cette profusion d'êtres humains et les ressources nécessaires à leur perfectionnement moral et à leur bien-être matériel' (166).
[85] Helg 1995, pp. 7, 16.

Martí hoped to resolve the racial fractures within Cuban society by inventing a unifying national concept of *cubanidad*. National cohesion resided in a common cultural identity which embraced and transcended distinct racial identities.[86] This idea was needed to counter the elite creole argument against independence from Spain on the basis that Cuba's racial heterogeneity meant it was not a nation and was therefore destined to remain under the tutelage of the metropole or else descend into a chaotic race war.[87] Martí's political and cultural programme was for the most part written in polemical texts that were published abroad and included, most famously, the articles 'Nuestra América' (1891) and 'Mi raza' (1893). Martí's writings were informed by Cuba but were also addressed to Latin America as a whole. Because Martí celebrated the cultural specificity of America and asserted its autonomy from Europe, he has long been regarded as pursuing a 'dissenting project' which went beyond the Eurocentrism of *latinidad*.[88] In 'Nuestra América', Martí made the boldly polemical claim that 'there is no racial hatred, because there are no races', a position which placed him at odds with the creoles' preoccupation with racial amelioration and their fears of black insurrection.[89] However, Martí was not making an ontological claim about the non-existence of race; rather, he was subordinating racial identification and the perception of racial difference to patriotism—a colour-blind faculty which is defined by loyalty to the native soil of the nation.[90] Patriotism upended the prevailing hierarchy of values which had privileged cultural and genealogical proximity to Spain above all else:

> In America the natural man has triumphed over the imported book. Natural men have triumphed over an artificial intelligentsia. The native mestizo [el mestizo autóctono] has triumphed over the alien, pure-blooded criollo [criollo

[86] Hatfield 2015, p. 23.
[87] Helg 1995, p. 43.
[88] Mignolo 2005, p. 45. Martí distinguished himself from writers such as Torres Caicedo, as Mignolo points out, by including Indians in the fold of the nation (91).
[89] José Martí, 'Our America' [1891]a, in *José Martí: Selected Writings*, ed. and trans. by Esther Allen (New York: Penguin Books, 2002), pp. 288-96 (p. 295). The criollo discourse of 'whitening' held that Cuba should subsidize the migration of Spaniards, especially those living in the Canary Islands, thereby strengthening the 'Latin' contingent on the island in order eventually 'solve' the race problem by marginalizing Afro-Cubans demographically. Helg 1995, p. 104.
[90] Patriotism and the 'patria' are recurring terms in Martí's writing. Hatfield's discussion of the normative weight on culture for Martí, and his admonition that Americans do not betray their native culture, are salient features of this. Hatfield 2015, pp. 24-5.

> exótico]. The battle is not between civilization and barbarity, but between false erudition and nature.[91]

Invoking a Rousseauian dichotomy between nature and artifice, Martí defined national authenticity as that which is proximate to the native soil of the nation. This authenticity is embodied by the 'autochthonous' population (the word, in its original Greek, suggests an image akin to being 'sprung from the soil') and is imparted to later elements of the nation which are organically fused to this base.[92] Unlike Bolívar in the 'Carta de Jamaica', Martí situated Latin American nations on an unbroken historical continuum stretching back to a mythologized Indian past. Martí grants the same degree of authenticity to the mestizo as to the 'raza aborigen' because the former is the product of a uniquely local synthesis which involves the latter. By contrast, the aloof criollos are condemned as traitors to the nation who despite being 'born in America […] are ashamed of the mother that raised them because she wears an Indian apron'.[93] In Martí's terms, the nation grew organically out of the native soil. This formulation achieved several ends: it relegated the criollos, Martí's political antagonists, to the status of inauthentic imitators of European fashions; its formulation of culture as the product of irreducibly local circumstances invalidated any claim that one country's culture was universal or superior to others; and its foregrounding of hybridization made it possible to imagine a national community which incorporated and transcended racial difference. However, Martí's formulation carried with it a serious risk, especially in his rejection of any form of aloofness from the processes of hybridization and convergence which generate the organism of the nation. Although he was targeting anti-national criollos, Martí's formulation could just as easily be used to castigate Afro-Cubans who sought to defend *their* rights within the confines of the nation.

Although Martí was on the face of it an advocate of cosmopolitanism, according equal value to different cultures and even granting that they could fuse and

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[91] Martí 1891a, p. 290; José Martí, 'Nuestra América' [1891]b, in *Obras completas*, 26 vols (Havana: Editorial Nacional de Cuba, 1963), vi, pp. 15-23 (p. 17).
[92] *Autochthon* 'is clearly a compound of the words *autos* (either "same" or "self") and *chthon* ("land," "earth"), which would give the meaning, depending on the sense of autos, of either "from the land itself" (i.e., earth-born) or "from the same land."' James Roy, 'Autochthony in Ancient Greece', in *A Companion to Ethnicity in the Ancient Mediterranean*, ed. by Jeremy McInerney (Chichester: Wiley Blackwell, 2014), pp. 241-55 (p. 242).
[93] Martí 1891a, p. 289. Also quoted by Hatfield 2015, pp. 24-5.

combine with one another, the end-point of this fusion was, in his view, the nation.[94] In this regard, comparing Martí's view of cultural hybridity with Marr's writings is useful because it indicates how, despite his belief in the creative power of community, Marr ultimately was able to transcend organicism. Marr thought that hybridization gave rise to new forms of language and was integral to the glottogonic process, even manifesting its enduring creative vitality: 'the creative force that gave rise to linguistic varieties did not cease with the emergence of the primitive form of language; this form gave rise to new material which served as a stimulus to further creativity, in turn generating new verities above all through crossing and hybridization [skreščenie i metisacija].'[95] Although he refers to a process of linguistic 'metisacija', a cognate of the Spanish 'mestizaje', this is as far as the resemblance with Martí goes.[96] Marr did not see the nation as the end-point of linguistic crossing. It was merely one formation within an evolving process, and not a timeless 'monad.'[97] While Chapter 3 will consider how Marr went beyond the organic community as imagined by thinkers such as Martí, for now it is enough to observe that, in approaching the French language, Firmin too evoked the idea of an open-ended process which did not stop at the nation.

Martí and Firmin have generally been thought of as pursuing complimentary goals. They have been described as fellow proponents of a 'humanist universalism' who defended categories of political subjectivity marginalized by the 'dominant and destructive universalism of the West'.[98] Martí was even found to have been carrying handwritten notes on *De l'Égalité des races humaines* on his person when he set forth to the Battle of Dos Ríos where he met his demise.[99] Despite the ideological affinity between the two men, Firmin's experience of independent Cuba was marked

[94] For a discussion of the ambiguities of Martí's cosmopolitanism and internationalism, see Daniel 2017, pp. 157-8.
[95] Marr [1920], p. 90. My translation of this difficult passage was aided by consulting Friedrich Braun's German translation: Marr 1923a, p. 37.
[96] For the derivation of 'mestizaje' from Latin 'mixto', see Juan E. De Castro, *Mestizo Nations: Culture, Race, and Conformity in Latin American Literature* (Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 2002), p. 18.
[97] On the term 'monad' in relation to the languages of the Caucasus, see Cherchi and Manning 2002, p. 26.
[98] Daniel 2017, p. 182. See also Glodel Mezilas, 'Race and Modernity in the Caribbean Discourse', trans. by Nathan H. Dize and Siobhan Meï, in *Reconstructing the Social Sciences and Humanities: Anténor Firmin, Western Intellectual Tradition, and Black Atlantic Tradition*, ed. by Celucien L. Joseph and Paul C. Mocombe (New York and London: Routledge, 2021), pp. 11-28 (pp. 18-19).
[99] Emilio Jorge Rodríguez, *Una suave, tierna línea de montañas azules: Nicolás Guillén y Haití* (Havana: Casa de las Américas, 2017), pp. 97-8.

by a persistence of racial prejudice. Although this could be regarded as a failure to implement Martí's vision, the experience suggests once again the difficulty in constructing post-racial sympathy despite the optimistically teleological claims of the *antillanistas*. More troubling limitations have been pointed out within Martí's vision itself and the ends to which it was put politically. Martí's emphasis on national authenticity made culture do 'the normative work of repudiated racial categories.'[100] Although he attempted to make issues of racial difference immaterial to Cubanness, Martí's formulations did not translate into the enfranchisement of Afro-Cubans within the national community. In 'Mi raza', Martí denied the existence of 'racial divisions and racial differences of a people naturally divided', which is to say 'naturally divided' within the nation, and counselled 'taking pleasure in merit and pride in anyone, black or white, who honors the land where we were born.'[101] Cubanness so defined set up an almost intractable dilemma for Afro-Cubans by making it impossible for them to mobilize politically to acquire their rightful share of participation in the nation without being seen as traitors to the nation. Firmin was far from raising this point explicitly, let alone indicting Martí's vision. Yet his time in Cuba exposed him to this predicament, which we can see by turning to the biographical circumstances which produced the *Lettres*.

## 2.4 Firmin in Havana: Afrodescendants and the Limits of Nationhood

Firmin's encounter with the racial politics of Cuba during his brief tenure as Haitian ambassador to that country exposed the limits of the nation building project when it came to the rights of Afrodescendants. Firmin's diplomatic career coincided with a tumultuous period of Cuban history during which the fruits of independence were tentatively being enjoyed and the search for national identity was well under way. The foundational discourse of Cubanness was based on a conception of the nation as a unified entity which dissolved all internal racial difference. *Cubanidad* was to a significant degree an invention of José Martí who, despite his premature death in

[100] Hatfield 2015, p. 24.
[101] José Martí, 'My Race' [1893], in *José Martí: Selected Writings*, ed. and trans. by Esther Allen (2002), pp. 318-21 (pp. 319-20).

1896, was venerated and constantly invoked in political discourse. Martí's vision of natural culture was attractive for numerous reasons and solved dilemmas facing Haiti. The conception of national culture as hybrid and thus greater than the sum of its parts helped resolve the dilemma that the most salient features of Cuban official culture were of Spanish origin. The discourse of hybridity enabled the claim that European cultural forms had been organically integrated into the American nation and that their use there did not represent mimicry. In Martí's terms, foreign cultural forms could be 'grafted onto our republics, but we must be the trunk.'[102] As we shall see later in Firmin's reflections on Haitian linguistic policy, his native country faced the analogous problem of employing European cultural forms in a manner which could potentially be construed as threatening national sovereignty. The organic holism of the hybrid nation, as conceived by Martí, resolved the problem of inauthentic mimicry but introduced new difficulties. It made Afro-Cubans vulnerable to the charge of imperilling national unity should they seek to mobilize to secure their rights in the name of racial equality. Such a move was readily construed as opening a rupture within the inviolable body of the nation. Although Firmin only addresses his time in Cuba parenthetically, it is possible to fill in the gaps by looking beyond the text and by considering the discursive parameters placed on Afrodescendants within Cuba, parameters from which Firmin was not exempt.

Afro-Cubans occupied an ambiguous position in public life. They had played a central role in the Cuban struggle for independence, including during the Ten Years' War (1868-1878) and the War of Independence (1895-1898). Although not all members of the independence movement recognized their contribution, Martí was one of those who did, arguing that they had earned their right to full citizenship.[103] The abolition of slavery came about in 1886, and further reforms during and after the War of Independence brought about formal legal equality for all citizens, including Afro-Cubans; however, these legal reforms failed to overcome the political and economic exclusion facing Afro-Cubans.[104] There were exceptional instances of Afro-Cubans who occupied positions of prominence in society. These included the

[102] Martí 1891a, p. 291; Martí 1891b, p. 13.
[103] Leyda Oquendo, 'José Martí. Apuntes sobre su antirracismo militante', in *Raza y Racismo*, ed. by Esther Pérez and Marcel Lueiro (Havana: Editorial Caminos, 2009), pp. 261-71 (pp. 266-8); Helg 1995, pp. 45-6.
[104] Helg 1995, p. 15.

journalist Juan Gualberto Gómez, who championed the cause of black social integration and argued that white Cubans and the *raza de color* (comprising Afro-Cubans and mulattoes) were 'children of the same trunk'.[105] Gómez had to be careful to make it clear that he advocated Afro-Cuban emancipation within the context of the nation and that he was not seeking Haitian-style separatism.[106] After independence, prominent Afro-Cubans were frequently co-opted and used demonstratively to prove that racial equality existed in Cuba and that colour was no barrier to advancement according to 'merit'.[107] According to this argument, Martí's vision of racial equality had been achieved in the struggle against Spain, and now no further adjustments to the social contract were necessary.[108]

The circumstances of Firmin's tenure in Havana in March 1909 illustrated some of the contradictions surrounding the prominence accorded to certain black individuals in Cuban public discourse. His arrival in the country was given wide coverage and his friendship with Martí was emphasized. Press coverage of Firmin's diplomatic investiture painted the current Cuban government in a positive light by suggesting that Martí's vision of racial equality had been realized. Firmin's appointment as ambassador, which was something of a dubious honour within the context of Haitian politics, coincided with a transitional moment in Cuban politics.[109] One month prior to his arrival, the second US military occupation of Cuba came to an end and a civilian government was reinstated. The pretext for the occupation had been the threat to public order represented by José Miguel Gómez's 'Liberal rebellion'. Many Afro-Cubans supported Gómez because he promised to address social inequalities and black exclusion from public jobs.[110] During the second military occupation, Liberal Afro-Cuban support was split between Gómez and his rival Alfredo Zayas. The 'fusion' of the *miguelista* and *zayista* factions in the 1909

[105] Juan Gualberto Gómez, 'Lo que somos', *La Igualdad*, 7 April 1892, as quoted by Helg 1995, p. 39. Helg notes that the unusually binary construct of 'raza de color' in Cuba, comprising blacks and mulattoes (as Firmin put it, 'tous les individus ayant dans les veines même une parcelle de sang africain' [124]) was an identity 'imposed from above' which could conversely be deployed as a means of mobilizing collective action. Helg 1995, pp 13-4.
[106] Ibid, p. 41.
[107] Ibid, p. 122.
[108] Ibid, pp. 106, 126.
[109] Firmin's appointment as ambassador came about after the ousting of President Nord Alexis by Antoine Simon in December 1908, which permitted Firmin to return to Haiti from Saint-Thomas. Despite being an ally of Simon, Firmin's charisma and popularity made him enough of a political threat to warrant being assigned a diplomatic post abroad. Price-Mars 1964, pp. 377-379.
[110] Helg 1995, pp. 137-9.

government consolidated their black support base, but Afro-Cuban support for mainstream parties was to be increasingly tested as the promised reforms failed to materialize.[111] It is perhaps not surprising that the newly formed government would wish to display their solidarity with one of the most famous black Caribbean politicians of the era, given that their political future relied on avoiding the kind of Afro-Cuban insurrection which may once again bring about US occupation. Firmin's arrival was announced in the illustrated paper *El Figaro*, which printed his portrait, but it was the *miguelista* daily paper *El Triunfo* which allotted most space to the official reception of the new Haitian ambassador.[112] The reception was a lavish affair: in formal attire, and joined by his son Eberle, Firmin presented his credentials to President Gómez, accompanied by his Vice-President Zayas, seemingly the entire cabinet of ministers, and before a large audience of worthies. The event took place in the presidential palace and was accompanied by a military band and a guard of honour. The paper reported Firmin's eloquent speech in praise of the 'lazos de amistad' between the two nations, which was well received by those in attendance.[113] In another article in *El Triunfo*, Firmin's reception in Havana was celebrated as heralding a return of the 'espíritu de la solidaridad antillana' exemplified by Martí.[114] Yet another article in that paper, this time written by Martí's old Puerto Rican comrade Sotero Figueroa, praised the sincerity of the words exchanged between Firmin and President Gómez and printed the now canonical letter by Martí after his visit in Cap Haïtien which refers to Firmin as 'un haitiano extraordinario'.[115] In the *Lettres*, Firmin acknowledges the praise lavished upon him in Havana with a slight note of embarrassment: 'ce qui explique le grand enthousiasme qu'y provoqua ma présence […] ce sont—au dessus d'une réputation littéraire et scientifique peut-être contestable—les liens sympathiques et moraux, qui ont existé entre Dr Betances, José Marti et moi' (LST, 124-5). Perhaps this is a display of false modesty—after all, Firmin is careful to reproduce the most ebullient words of praise directed at him—

[111] Ibid, pp. 146-7.
[112] 'El General Antenor Firmin', *El Figaro*, 28 February 1909, p. 111; for the political affiliation of *El Triunfo*, see Helg 1995, p. 165.
[113] 'Cuba y Haití. Presentación de credenciales del Ministro de Haití al señor Presidente de la Republica en Audiencia pública', *El Triunfo*, 3 March 1909, p. 12.
[114] 'Por Antenor Firmin', *El Triunfo*, 4 March 1909, p. 10 [reprinted from *El Yara*]. The *Triunfo* reprint is cited by Firmin himself (1910, p. 125).
[115] 'Jose Martí y Antenor Firmin', *El Triunfo*, 7 March 1909 [no pagination]. Firmin refers to his article, (1910 p. 116, f. 1). For details of Sotero Figueroa's ideological proximity to Martí, see Toledo 2000, p. 26.

but we may also detect an acknowledgement that the enthusiasm he inspired stemmed less from his personal merits than from the political ideals his presence signified.

The press coverage of Firmin's instatement as ambassador painted a picture of a Cuba that was on close fraternal terms with its nearest Caribbean neighbour, a relationship which both reinforced the current Cuban government's ties to Martí and the era of regional emancipation emblematized by him and implied a resolution of racial tensions domestically; however, if we look at the broader context of Cuban public discourse around Haiti, a different image appears. Haiti had long embodied white Cuban fears of black political agency and the consequences that could arise from granting civil rights to Afro-Cubans.[116] Fears of 'Haitian-style' insurgency from among the Afro-Cuban population in the East of the island were stoked by Spanish governors and persisted after the War of Independence, finding an object in Afro-Antillean labour migrants from Haiti and Jamaica.[117] For their part, many members of the *raza de color* in Cuba sought to distance themselves from any association with Haiti so as to prove their ability to be productive members of Cuban society. White Cuban fears of 'African barbarism' were routinely stoked in the press both before and after the country's independence from Spain. Indeed, the headlining article of the issue of *El Triunfo* which covered Firmin's arrival was one of many sensationalized reports on the trials of Afro-Cuban witches (brujos) accused of abducting white children.[118] White fear placed members of the Afro-Cuban intelligentsia in an extremely delicate position, whereby their calls for black civil rights always risked incurring the accusation that they were fomenting rebellion or seeking to upend the prevailing 'racial harmony'.[119]

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[116] In Giovannetti-Torres' terms, white Cubans' 'terrified consciousness' was particularly agitated by the myth of Haitian-style black insurrection imported to their island by disruptive foreigners, such as Jamaican and Haitian labour migrants, who had the potential to upset the supposed racial harmony that existed in Cuba: Jorge L. Gionvannetti-Torres, *Black British Migrants in Cuba: Race, Labor, and Empire in the Twentieth-Century Caribbean, 1898-1948* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2018), pp. 42-3. Black stereotypes in Cuba played on the fear of 'African' anti-Western irrationalism and focused on such popular icons as witchcraft (brujería), secret societies (Helg 1995, pp. 17-8) and the figure of José Antonio Aponte, a real-life Afrodescendant anti-slavery rebel in early nineteenth-century Cuba who was depicted in fiction, a century later, as seeking a Haitian-style revolution. Rodríguez 2017, p. 34.

[117] Helg 1995, pp. 49-50; Giovannetti-Torres 2018, pp. 41-2.

[118] For the 'doña Luisa' case in question, see also Luis Nicolau Parés, *Sorcery in the Black Atlantic* (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 2011), p. 127.

[119] Cf. Helg 1995, pp. 51-2.

Countering this accusation required an act of differentiation, in which the distinct Cubanness of the island's Afrodescendants was stressed and contrasts were made against other black populations of the Caribbean. A figure who inhabited this contradiction was the Afro-Cuban journalist, later politician, Juan Gualberto Gómez. In 1893 his newspaper *La Igualdad* had to contend with an article in the conservative pro-Spanish *Diario de la Marina* which painted a lurid picture of what would happen should autonomy be granted to Cuba: the black population of Cuba would take control of the island and expel the whites, as had occurred during the Haitian Revolution. The response in the pro-autonomy *La Igualdad* was a carefully delineated explanation of why Cuba was not Haiti, and why the conditions that brought about the revolution were not present in Cuba: Afro-Cubans, Gómez argued, had lived on the island for several generations and thus 'poseen los propios elementos de civilización europea', in contrast to which the slaves brought to Haiti 'non tienen cultura ninguina'. Furthermore, Gómez charged, the *Diario* ignored 'las condiciones de carácter y filiación antropológica del elemento negro haitiano' and their contrast to Cuba. The Spanish and Portuguese transported their slaves from the Gulf of Guinea and the Congo, in the process importing 'los pueblos más pacíficos del África'. The French by contrast 'siempre trataran más con las belicosas tribus senegaleses, con las mandingas briosos y con los indómitos dahoneyanos [*sic*]', which explains Haitians' resistance to the adoption of European culture. All of this tended to undermine the assumption that Cuba was on the way to becoming 'una segunda edición de Haití', or that 'en ella se desataría la guerra de razas que terminaría con la derrota y la expulsión de los blancos'.[120] Gómez's argumentative strategy was to stress the intrinsic difference between Afrodescendants in Cuba from their counterparts in Haiti, but also to emphasize the transformative civilizing benefits for Afro-Cubans of integrating within the broader national community. Juan Gualberto Gómez was a supporter of Martí's cause, and both writers resemble one another in their respective conceptions of Cuban nationhood, in which racial integration is emphasized and national cohesion is prioritized above regional solidarity with the Afro-Antillean community.[121]

[120] [Juan Gualberto Gómez], 'Cuba no es Haití', *La Igualdad*, 23 May 1893, p. 2. Portions of this article are also quoted in Helg 1995, p. 52.

[121] Juan Gualberto Gómez and Martí cited one another in their writings and jointly defended the vision of Cubanness which Martí had expressed in 'Mi raza' ('Cubano es más que blanco, más que

During his brief tenure as ambassador in Havana, Firmin was caught up in these issues of race and political representation. Afro-Cubans who had become disenchanted with the Liberal Party, including associations of veterans, formed a separate political party in 1908 which came to be known as the Partido Independiente de Color (PIC). They set out to address the many forms of social exclusion facing Afrodescendants, including their absence of representation within the country's diplomatic corps; as a political challenge to the Liberals' representation of the black electorate, the PIC was charged with pursuing an unpatriotic 'racist' cause at odds with Cuba's supposedly post-racial constitution.[122] The PIC was officially outlawed in 1910 when a constitutional amendment, which was introduced by the Afro-Cuban senator Martín Morúa Delgado, made it illegal for political parties to organize along racial lines.[123] Forced out of the political mainstream, the PIC eventually resorted to organizing a revolt in 1912 in the hopes of triggering another US military intervention which would overturn the Liberal government; tragically, President Gómez initiated a violent repression which saw the deaths of several thousand black Cubans.[124] The banning of the PIC and the events that followed all occurred after Firmin's death. However, he is reported to have received the leaders of the PIC, Evaristo Estenoz and Pedro Ivonnet, at his residence in Havana.[125] Whatever the nature or actual significance of this meeting may have been at the time, the press picked up on it during the trial of PIC members the following year and spun a sensational account of how Firmin and Estenoz had been to foment a rebellion across the whole of Cuba.[126] This reaction reflected a broader theme in the white Cuban perception of race: their faith in the myth of Cuban racial harmony, which led them to assume that any disruption must have come from outside the country.[127] Firmin was no longer in Cuba by the time his alleged complicity in a plot

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mulato, más que negro') against the white accusation of fomenting Haitian-style rebellion. Rodríguez 2017, p. 59. Cf. also Helg 1995, p. 53.

[122] Giovannetti-Torres 2018, pp. 38-9; Helg 1995, pp. 145-59.

[123] Giovannetti-Torres 2018, p. 39; Helg 1995, p 165.

[124] Estimates of the number of dead range from 2,000 to 6,000: Helg 1995, p 225; Giovannetti-Torres 2018, p. 40.

[125] Geneaus 2012, p. 95. Also cited by Rodríguez 2017, p. 63, who also references the following information from an older historical account: during the November 1910 trial of members of the PIC, a member of the secret police testified to having seen Estenoz enter the residence of the Haitian ambassador (Serafín Portuondo Linares, *Los Independientes de color: Historia del Partido Independiente de Color*, 2nd edn (Havana: Editorial Librería Selecta, 1950), p. 140.

[126] Helg 1995, pp. 176-7.

[127] Giovannetti-Torres 2018, p. 42.

was being circulated. He had already been transferred, in August 1909, to what was to be his last diplomatic post in London. According to Price-Mars, this move was instigated by Firmin's political opponents in Haiti, who felt that he needed to be sent even further away than Cuba; however, an additional factor may have been the Cuban government's discomfort over his meeting with PIC leaders, which constituted 'interference' in domestic affairs and warranted 'punishment.'[128]

The precise course of events has yet to be established. Nonetheless, certain tentative conclusions can be established: the possibility for Pan-Caribbean solidarity within Cuban mainstream discourse was extremely limited, as evidenced by the fact that the same paper which so enthusiastically welcomed Firmin in Havana would, less than a year later, throw its weight behind the Morúa amendment by printing anti-black and anti-Haitian propaganda; Firmin's experience in Cuba constitute a significant pretext to the *Lettres* because it is from London, the destination of Firmin's unwished-for transfer, that he compiled and prefaced the text.[129]

The Cuba episode can be meaningfully interpreted as part of Firmin's evolving view of nationalism and national identity, although his indirectness means we must carefully weight up different kinds of evidence. The history of the PIC and the brutal repression to which its members were subject has been interpreted as signalling the failure of José Martí's political philosophy: his vision that Cuban national identity transcended racial divisions meant that challenges to prevailing racial injustices were interpreted aprioristically as originating outside the country, or else as an assault on the nation from within.[130] Martí's recourse to a fundamentally 'statist' concept of political affiliation, notwithstanding his involvement with Pan-Caribbean struggles, has been criticized as Eurocentric and incapable of accommodating the 'essentially stateless model of political struggle' in which many Afro-Antilleans were engaged.[131] The concept of *cubanidad* espoused by Martí arguably did too little to overcome the inherited criollo ideology of racial

[128] Price-Mars 1964, p. 379. Geneaus 2012, p. 95.
[129] For the change of tone of *El Triunfo*, see Helg 1995, p. 165; Firmin was also personally targeted in a political caricature (Rodríguez 2017, p. 61).
[130] Giovannetti-Torres 2018, p. 40; Helg 1995, pp. 165-6.
[131] Brenda Gayle Plummer, 'Firmin and Martí at the Intersection of Pan-Americanism and Pan-Africanism', *José Martí's "Our America": from National to Hemispheric Cultural Studies*, ed. Jeffrey Belnap and Raúl Fernández (Durham, NC, and London: Duke University Press, 1998), pp. 210-227 (p. 218).

'improvement' through 'whitening' the population. Indeed, the discourse of racial improvement is evident in an article in Martí's New York-based Cuban nationalist newspaper *Patria*, in which the previously discussed article by Juan Gualberto Gómez on the racial characteristics of Cuba's blacks is endorsed and supplied with an editorial supplement. Granting the black man civil rights, the *Patria* article argues, will transform him from a 'cause of discord' into a source of national 'regeneration':

> Levantaráse aquí un pueblo vigoroso. La profecía de Michelet cumpliráse. Los descendientes de los dulces y pacíficos congos, uniránse más y más a los de los altivos conquistadores europeos. A toda fusión de sangre irá siempre aparejada la de los sentimientos [...].[132]

The vigour of the future nation is argued to derive from a fusion of the previously antagonistic elements of society—a process which requires the extension of equal rights to all citizens—which will give rise to a singular Cuban 'people'. The article may be arguing the opposite point to the criollos, who pathologized blackness and aimed to whiten the population, but nonetheless both concur that Cubanness must lead to the end of Afro-Cubans as a distinct entity within society. Firmin is far from expressing any criticism of Martí. Their brief meeting in 1893 was a source of Pan-Caribbean honour for Firmin. Moreover, Martí's legacy was nuanced. Members of the PIC aligned themselves with his thought—Martí, after all, had proclaimed that Cuba existed for both whites and blacks.[133] The struggle to transcend criollo cultural dominance and their adherence to what has been termed 'una nacionalidad aséptica' involved a lengthy reworking, reinterpretation, and appropriation of Martí's intellectual legacy from the clutches of official ideology.[134] Firmin does not provide any direct commentary on Martí's *cubanidad* or the claim that Cuban national identity could reconcile all segments of society into a harmonious whole. However, as we saw in the exchange with Carvajal which bookends his brief direct references

[132] 'Así se habla', *Patria*, 10 June 1893 [no pagination]. It is unclear precisely which of Michelet's 'prophecies' is being invoked, but the following pronouncement on racial hybridity would be a likely candidate: 'Les races les plus énergiques qui ont paru sur la terre sont sorties du mélange d'*éléments opposés* (qui semblaient opposés?): exemple, le mélange du blanc et de la femme noire, qui donne le produit mulâtre, de vigueur extraordinaire […].' Michelet [1860], p. 180; cited by Rétat 2005, p. 21, and Reynaud-Paligot 2014, p. 91.
[133] Helg 1995, p. 151.
[134] Rodríguez 2017, p. 65. Rodríguez, furthermore, argues that the massacre of 1912 marked a failure to realize Martí's vision (ibid, p. 176).

to Cuba, Firmin had grown sceptical of attempts to treat the nation as a unified harmonious organism serving everyone and reconciling all differences. Collective identity, as Firmin saw it, could not be assumed to exist latently as a pre-existing form of popular consciousness. These reservations would apply just as much to the Cuban myth that national independence had relegated racial discord to history, an idea characteristic of Martí's writings and the way that his legacy was used politically at the start of the new century.

Despite its shortcomings, the nation state was the only viable model for political organization left to Firmin when it came to formulating Haiti's future place in the world. The events of 1898 had spelled the end of Pan-Caribbean confederation, at least for the foreseeable future. United States military intervention, the marginalization of Antonio Maceo, the death of Betances, and the failure of Puerto Rico to achieve independence jointly with Cuba represented the vindication of a creole model of home rule over a more radical non-statist model of political affiliation based on non-white solidarity.[135] Firmin had outlived virtually all his political allies. This is not to say he had given up on the ideal of transnational solidarity; indeed, he came to be involved with the nascent Pan-Africanist movement.[136] In the immediate term, however, Haiti still needed to negotiate its place with its neighbours and with the global powers both new and old. Firmin's *Lettres* do not signal his abandonment of the nation state, as Dash has claimed; nor do they indicate ignorance on Firmin's part of the 'essentially stateless model of political struggle' required to achieve black emancipation globally.[137]

In the next section we will examine Firmin's writings on Haitian national culture because they explore analogous questions to those facing Martí but arrive at different conclusions. 'Latinidad' and the discourse of 'American' cultural identity, of which 'Nuestra América' is a highly canonical instance, solved useful cultural problems. Advocates of autonomy and independence in Cuba as elsewhere in Latin

[135] José F. Buscaglia-Salgado, *Undoing Empire: Race and Nation in the Mulatto Caribbean* (Minneapolis and London: University of Minnesota Press, 2003), pp. 252-64.
[136] Firmin corresponded with his compatriot Benito Sylvain and with the Trinidadian Henry Sylvester Williams over what came to be the first Pan-African Conference, held in London in 1900. Karem 2011, pp. 33-4; Williams 2021, pp. 124-5.
[137] Plummer 1998, p. 218. In a similar vein, Arroyo argues that 'in preaching educational uplift, Firmin and other writers of his generation [e.g. Martí] failed to criticize the role of structural racism in their respective societies.' Arroyo 2013, p. 88.

America wanted to sever ties with Spain, but the most salient features of the cultures of the former colonies (at least in the view of the national elites) were of European origin.[138] Associating the new nation so strongly with its European cultural heritage left it exposed to the charge of being derivative. The discourse of hybridity solved this problem by acknowledging that the American nation contained multiple distinct elements—some European, such as language, literature and religion, others 'indigenous', such as the imagined continuity established by Martí and others to pre-Columbian civilization—while arguing that these elements had become fused and dialectically transformed in the new nation. The nation was singular even if its component parts were drawn from multiple sources. Thus, the Nicaraguan poet Rubén Darío, a representative alongside Rodó of the literary movement *modernismo*, advocated developing 'the Castilian tongue in America' by retaining its 'ancient riches' and simultaneously seeking the 'aggrandizement of those same riches in vocabulary, rhythm, plasticity and nuance'.[139] Darío and the cohort he inspired thought that Old World culture could be fused with the New because of the American nation's unique capacity for synthesis.[140] Across the Spanish Americas, cultural hybridity was understood to have given rise to a new organic whole onto which foreign elements could be 'grafted' (Martí's term) without incurring the charge of derivativeness. Unfortunately, cultural hybridity was held to be driven by ethnic or 'sociological' convergence. We have seen the consequences for Afrodescendants of this conception of the nation as a harmonious organic whole. Firmin, for his part, had little faith in the existence of the supposedly 'natural' processes of consolidation and fusion said to give rise to the new American nation. He did not believe that national identity existed in a state of latency within the population, or that a broad disinterested axis of identification existed outside of intellectual elite circles. He still had to address the problem of proving that Francophone literary culture was 'at home' in Haiti; that it had been fully adopted and was wielded with originality by writers and by the populace, thereby evading the

[138] Martí 'perceived clear distinctions between the Anglo-American culture of the north and the eminently superior Spanish culture of Latin America.' Karem 2011, p. 17.
[139] Rubén Darío and Ricardo Jaimes Freyre, *La Revista de América*, ed. by Boyd G. Carter (Managua: Publicaciones del Centenario de Rubén Darío, 1967), p. 1. As quoted and translated by Gerard Aching, *The Politics of Spanish American* modernismo*: By Exquisite Design* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), pp. 137-8.
[140] 'Because they could freely appreciate (objectify and incorporate) cultural artifacts from the locally produced and 'foreign' texts that they read, the *modernistas* moved away from certain hegemonic, 'literary essences' and returned to those essences by trying to renew them.' Ibid, pp. 138-9.

charge of cultural subservience to France. He had to find a way of proving this that did not invoke the organicist ideal of the American nation, which may have worked in the Spanish Americas, but which was inaccessible to Haiti. Haiti was excluded from the circle of *latinidad* and, for reasons we shall see, Firmin could not translate the terms of this cultural ideology into French.

## 2.5 Haiti and the French Language

Firmin begins the section of the *Lettres* entitled 'Haïti et la langue française' by setting out a dilemma. French, 'la langue officielle et nationale d'Haïti', is a language supremely endowed with 'clarté' and 'sobre harmonie', making it 'le plus merveilleux véhicule de la pensée humaine'; it is a universal language of science and literature, understood 'dans les plus hautes sphères sociales'; but despite all these merits, Haiti's francophone status is a liability:

> Mais lorsque l'on considère l'ensemble des peuples qui nous entourent et dont l'évolution nationale s'accomplit en même temps que la nôtre, on ne peut nier que nous n'ayons une position déplorable, au point de vue de la langue. (LST, 87-8)

French isolates Haiti from its natural political allies in the Spanish Americas and places the country in the company only of Guadeloupe and Martinique, which Firmin sees as inconsequential due to their small size. Revealingly, Firmin makes no reference to Kreyòl. Indeed, the language is barely mentioned at all anywhere in Firmin's oeuvre.[141] Admittedly, it was only during the period of US occupation beginning in 1915 that Kreyòl became a sustained object of interest for Haitians intellectuals, as a form of cultural resistance.[142] Nonetheless, Firmin's choice not to accord the language any attention did not reflect the consensus view among Haitian intellectuals of his generation.[143] Rather, it was consistent with his elitism, which is

[141] In *M. Roosevelt*, Firmin recounts being accosted in the street by a man speaking 'patois créole'. Firmin 1905, p. 426.
[142] Bellegarde-Smith 2007, p. 107.
[143] We know, for instance, that Louis-Joseph Janvier was willing to discuss Kreyòl with European scholars. The folklorist Henri Gaidoz related remarks by Janvier about Kreyòl in a letter to Hugo Schuchardt. Despite remarking to Gaidoz that 'dans son pays on ne s'occupe pas de cela ni même du

to say his belief that the most able and educated should set the cultural tone of the country. However, this omission had consequences: it meant that Firmin overlooked the potential that Kreyòl held for mobilizing the linguistic capacities of the mass of the population, which could have aided political enfranchisement and formed the basis for articulating a uniquely Haitian national culture unbeholden to Europe. By defining Haiti as exclusively francophone, as the bearer of 'l'héritage linguistique que nous a laissé l'ancienne colonie de Saint-Domingue' (LST, 87), Firmin locked himself and his country into the same dilemma which had faced criollo nation builders in the Spanish Americas: how to appropriate European cultural and linguistic norms without becoming culturally subservient to the former colonial metropole. But in contrast to Martí, Rodó, and all other ideologues of *latinidad*, Firmin did not have the option of membership in a large community of countries sharing the same language. For Firmin, Haiti remains outside the fold of Latin America due to language; other writers excluded it due to race, but Firmin does not mention this.[144] If the Spanish Americas enjoy an enviable position, the opposite is true of countries comprising the anglophone Caribbean, which, in Firmin's view, are 'pâles satellites' destined to be absorbed into '*Greater Britain*' (LST, 88).[145] This comparison establishes the threat of dependency facing Haiti. The problem thus formulated is not how to preserve local linguistic practice in the face of globalization, but rather which global language to align Haiti with (Firmin dismisses proposals to adopt English) and how to leverage this linguistic affiliation in a manner that avoids dependency.

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patois créole', Janvier was keen to stress that 'les divers dialectes du Créole français sont très différents et que lui-même a peine à comprendre le créole de la Martinique et de nos Antilles.' It is interesting that Janvier stresses the specificity of Haitian Kreyòl with respect to other francophone creoles, which suggests he viewed the language as more than merely a corrupted version of French. Hugo Schuchardt Archiv (Graz), Correspondence, 21 April 1884, Brief 042-03244, Available online: <http://schuchardt.uni-graz.at/id/letter/5196> (last accessed 5th June 2020).

[144] See Mignolo 2005, p. 79 in reference to Michel Chevalier on Haiti.

[145] The imagery of the satellite appears to be borrowed from a work by Paul Vibert, referred to in the chapter of the *Lettres* on the 'Confédération antillienne'. Firmin notes there that he was referred to by Vibert as the most likely candidate to serve as leader of a 'Confédération des petites républiques latino-américaines, réunies en un faisceau national, pour s'opposer et échapper à l'absorption menaçante de la grande république étoilée' (116). In his work of 1895 Vibert presented a confederation as the only means for independent Caribbean states to preserve their autonomy: 'La vérité, c'est que les quatre grandes Antilles grandissent tandis que les petites sont destinées à conserver un rang inférieur et à n'être que des satellites; Haïti est la mieux placée pour cette transformation, mais elle impose de grands devoirs.' Paul Vibert, *La République d'Haïti. Son présent, son avenir économique* (Paris and Nancy: Berger-Levrault, 1895), p. 24.

Firmin needed a strategy for addressing these unpromising circumstances. In the Americas, the Spanish language encompassed a community of speakers large enough to achieve critical mass independently of Europe. Furthermore, the ideology of Latindad asserted that Spanish cultural forms, including language, had been so thoroughly integrated into American reality that there was no longer any dependency on Spain. Firmin looked admiringly at Latin America for its cultural cohesion and the felicitous marriage of language and mentality he observed there. This contrasted sharply with Haiti. Due to its isolation, virtuosic use of French by Haitian writers could be viewed simply as imitation of France rather than as a reflection of any uniquely Haitian cultural identity. This was a problem, because Firmin sincerely believed that French suited the Haitian character and temperament, as we shall see. Indeed, he was far from rejecting all the basic premises of *latinidad* as a cultural model, such as the belief that mentality and language should coincide. Drawing a contrast with the status of Spanish in Latin America, Firmin did not think that the full integration of Haiti's inherited legacy of French into national culture and popular linguistic practice would come about as the inevitable consequence of sociological law, but instead argued that it would require planning and social engineering. In this section of the *Lettres*, Firmin prescribes a deep 'philological' study of French in Haiti, so as to make Haitians masters of the language rather than mere imitators, and to extend the elites' francophone virtuosity down to the masses.

In Firmin's view, Spanish both reflected and constituted the cultural unity which characterized Latin America. The 'unité de langage' stretching across such a large region marks 'la vivace empreinte du génie espagnol dans l'hémisphère occidental.' The national genius of Spain shaped the region's mentality in addition to its linguistic makeup:

> [L'Espagne] y a projeté ses qualités de résistance, de fierté et d'enthousiasme; son esprit de chevalerie, à la fois amoureuse et guerrière, religieuse et galante; elle y a inoculé aussi ses défauts de dureté, de nonchalance orgueilleuse et de marasme moral, son amour de la réalité ardente et féroce, excentrique et provocante (LST, 88).

Firmin is indulging in a romantic and exoticizing portrayal of the Spanish character, emphasizing such traits as emotionality, violence, and the value tradition and

chivalric morality. The implication that the Spanish character adheres to the past—almost to the point of stagnation—helps establish a point of comparison with French intellectual culture, which Firmin will in due course praise for being progressive and rational.[146] The cultural legacy of Spain is so pronounced that 'lorsqu'on parle de l'Amérique latine, c'est comme si l'on disait l'Amérique espagnole.' However, Firmin acknowledges the importance of local processes of cultural hybridization which are specific to the Americas, and which modulate the Spanish legacy:

> La compénétration du tempérament espagnol et du caractère anglo-américain tend, de plus en plus, à former en ce groupe ethnique une nouvelle entité démographique des plus intéressantes et bien digne de l'attention du sociologue. Il n'y a pas de doute qu'il en sorte, à la longue, une civilisation plus suave, plus artistique et plus harmonieuse que celle des Américains du Nord, en même temps que plus vigoureuse, plus positive et plus énergique, que celle des contrées méridionales de l'Europe (LST, 91).

Firmin's portrayal of the hybrid nature of Latin American identity recapitulates tropes of *latinidad* in asserting superiority to the Anglo-Saxons (or Anglo-Americans), even when some of the characteristics of the latter are being appropriated. Hybridization ('compénétration'), and the as yet incomplete process it implies (a process which will bear fruit 'à la longue'), injects an element of futurity which was absent from the portrayal of the Spanish character as static. Hybridization balances a set of complimentary traits which are archetypally feminine (the sensual or 'suave' civilization) and masculine (vigour, energy).[147] Firmin thus touches on a dense nexus of discourse and anxiety, in which Latin American writers simultaneously denounced Anglo-Saxon bellicosity and feared that their own nations had become effeminate, over-refined, and decadent.[148] Firmin would appear to

[146] Firmin's dissociation of Spain from modernity, his association of it instead with static tradition, would be consistent with what Enrique Dussel has diagnosed as a blindness by philosophers from Hegel onwards to 'Europe's Iberian periphery' when it comes to understanding the origins of the modern world. Dussel 1993, pp. 67, 74.

[147] Gendered terms occur elsewhere in the *Lettres*, in Firmin's analysis of the events of 1898: 'Mais, tandis que Cuba, qui avait eu l'énergie et la virilité de lever l'étendard de la révolte, fut reconnue indépendante, Puerto-Rico ne fut soustrait à la domination espagnole que pour tomber sous la main des Etats-Unis' (117).

[148] Writers who valorised Latin American 'chivalry' and absence of materialism had to contend with the fact that these traits were termed as feminine. McGuiness 2003, p. 100. For a discussion of the inverse relationship between refinement and virility in Latin American discourse, along with Rodó's veneration of youth as an agent of 'regeneration', see Coletta 2018, p. 125.

approve of the belief that Latin America comprised a new hybrid civilization. Above all, widespread use of Spanish served to unify a large swathe of territory under a 'discipline intellectuelle commune', creating 'un esprit de solidarité de race et surtout de civilisation' (LST, 89). This made it possible for 'des savants, des littérateurs, des artistes' to criss-cross most of Central and South America and the Caribbean 'sans avoir le sentiment net et précis d'être sortis de leurs pays' (LST, 90). Firmin even goes so far as to assimilate Portuguese, and thus Brazil, into the Spanish linguistic zone: 'la langue de Camoëns peut bien être considérée comme un idiome de la grande famille glossologique de la péninsule Hispanique' (LST, 88-9). In Firmin's view, Latin America exhibits a unity of culture and mentality which enables frictionless inter-American intellectual exchange.

The strengths of Latin America highlight Haiti's weakness and vulnerability. Being Latin American means benefitting from membership within a mutually reinforcing community of independent nations. By contrast,

> Haïti, moins heureuse, ne participera que médiocrement à ce grand concours ouvert aux peuples de civilisation latine, en Amérique. Sociologiquement, nous sommes des Afro-latins [*sic*]; mais, parmi les nations indépendantes de notre hémisphère, nous restons isolés, par la langue (LST, 91).

In keeping with the thematic focus of this section, it is the difference of language which Firmin identifies as the factor excluding Haiti from Latin America. Having said that, we cannot help but wonder whether language is meant to serve as a cipher for race. Although racial difference is ostensibly not at issue in this passage, the assertion of a hyphenized 'Afro-Latin' identity can be read as ambiguously linking and separating Haiti from the Latin world on account of the country's African origins. This indirectness would be consistent with Firmin's unwillingness to address the issue of racial prejudice in Latin America directly. The formulation 'Afro-latins' is especially noteworthy because, although it is possible now to speak of Afro-Latin-America', this was far from the case when Firmin was writing.[149] It was more typical to hyphenate Afrodescendants with their respective national setting: to speak of Afro-Cubans or Afro-Brazilians in a manner that implies their marginalization within

[149] Andrews dates its emergence to the late 1970s. George Reid Andrews, *Afro-Latin America, 1800-2000* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), p.3.

the nations in which they found themselves.[150] Firmin, by contrast, appears to evoke the idea of transnational solidarity among Afrodescendants in the Americas which Betances had pursued. However, this does not help Haiti's geopolitical situation. This brief passage highlights the disjunction between language, civilization, and 'sociology'. In Latin America, these factors coincide, meaning the continent can look forward to a bright future. The awkwardness of Haiti's situation, by contrast, establishes the need for pragmatic solutions which did not rely on the providential unfolding of processes of sociological development.

Despite the unpromising circumstances facing Haiti, Firmin was convinced that Haitians were temperamentally suited to the French language. He rejected the suggestion that Haiti should adopt English as its official language, an idea first proposed in the 1810s and revisited later in the century, because such a move would go against the grain of the Haitian character.[151] As well as the practical objection that there were no independent anglophone Caribbean or Central American nations with which Haiti could ally itself, Firmin had more essentialist reasons for opposing the adoption of English:

> Quoi que nous fassions, notre origine ethnique nous empêche de caresser l'idée de nous transformer, même moralement, en Anglo-Saxons. Il y a en nous une ardeur de tempérament et une richesse de sentiments affectifs trop débordantes et impérieuses, pour que nous puissions jamais nous imposer le flegme et l'égoïsme de l'homme du Nord. Il faudrait, pour cela, commencer par dépouiller notre organisme du feu caché, que le soleil de l'Afrique a allumé dans le sang généreux que nous ont transmis nos ancêtres (LST, 92).

Firmin embraces the idea that ethnicity determines temperamental and 'moral' traits, and that these are embodied in language. Haitians are thus naturally suited to French because the language accords with their innate temperament as descendants of Africa. Firmin's classification of character traits and his opposition between the 'cold' North and the 'hot' South recall the writings of theorists of *latinidad* such as

[150] 'Latin American writers and intellectuals had long been referring to their fellow citizens of African ancestry as Afro-Brazilians, Afro-Cubans, Afro-Venezuelans, and so on'. The consequences of treating Afrodescendants as an appendage to the nation can be observed in the work of Fernando Ortiz, later famous as a foundational scholar of Afro-Cuban culture, who began his career by advocating for a diminution of the African element of Cuban culture through the promotion of European immigration. Ibid, pp. 3, 119.
[151] Dubois 2012, p. 165.

Rodó, with their stereotyped depictions of Anglo-Saxon egotism and materialism.[152] The contrasting traits of phlegmaticness, the humour of cold climates, and tropical 'ardour' perhaps build on Firmin's reading of Broca's global climatic zones in *De l'Égalité*.[153] The suitability of French for Haiti is founded on this division of the world into broad Northern and Southern types between which French (unlike Spanish) strikes a felicitous balance. French is a 'langage du cœur uni à la raison' (LST, 92), a happy union of rationality and passion. The belief that French culture married the passion of the South with the reason and measure of the North, thereby tempering the heat of Italy with its own 'cooler air' and 'skies of milkier blue', was well established.[154] Michelet identified the strength of France with its prehistoric incorporation of geographically disparate races and the combination of sensual and rational traits they brought with them.[155] Firmin's claim is that Haitians share the same traits of temperament as the French, with both nations having an equal stake in reason and sentiment. The French language is a supreme vehicle for philosophical universalism because it does not express these ideals coldly but with fervour, infusing 'dans chaque âme une notion indéfectible de la liberté, de la justice et de la dignité personnelle' (LST, 92). Firmin's attempt to make cultural specificity relevant to Haiti's development in the world marks a departure from the culturally neutral universalism of *De l'Égalité*.[156]

Firmin's enthusiasm for the French language is, arguably, perfectly consistent with the long-held views of the Haitian elites. French literary culture was seen as something Haiti ought to emulate out of a sense of deference towards France. Firmin's political rival Demesvar Delorme—a friend of Lamartine, Hugo, and Michelet—enthused about Haiti's spiritual affinity with France, an affinity attributed to the fact that 'c'est par les langues que les civilisations se répandent.'[157] Haiti had a

[152] Coletta refers to Rodó's 'contrast between northern materialism versus Southern spiritualism.' Coletta 2018, p. 35.
[153] Cf. Firmin 1885, p. 116-7.
[154] Walter Pater, *The Renaissance: Studies in Art and Poetry* [1873], ed. by Adam Phillips (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998), p. 111.
[155] Cf. Reynaud-Paligot 2014, p. 90.
[156] The discussion of language in the *Lettres* furthermore signals a modification of his earlier assessment of 'la nullité des rapports naturels qu'on a essayé d'établir entre le langage et la race'. Firmin 1885, p. 195.
[157] Demesvar Delorme, *Les Théoriciens au pouvoir. Causeries historiques* (Paris: Plon, 1870), p. 183. Quoted by Patrick Bellegarde-Smith, *In the Shadow of Powers: Dantès Bellegarde in Haitian Social Thought*, 2nd edn (Nashville: Vanderbilt University Press, 2019), pp. 48-9. For Firmin's changing relationship with Delorme, see Joseph 2021, pp. 98-9, 108-9).

glorious destiny, Delorme wrote, as a nation which 'fondera un jour dans les Amériques une nouvelle civilisation française.' Accordingly, it would behove France to protect its fellow francophone republic against the onslaught of Anglo-Saxon materialism.[158] Hence, a belief in Haiti's spiritual affinity with France could serve to reinforce the cultural pre-eminence of the metropole over its former colony. This sentiment was encapsulated in Michelet's famous, and thoroughly paternalistic, characterization of Haiti as 'la France noire', an epithet which Firmin cites approvingly (LST, 94).[159] Firmin's praise of the elegance and clarity of French echoes Onésime Reclus, originator of the concept of *Francophonie*, who encouraged the teaching of French globally as a way of preserving national prestige in a world increasingly dominated by English. [160] *Francophonie* was from its very inception a paternalistic project which did not challenge the authority of the metropole.[161] Firmin at times seems to adopt a pose of deference towards France, not least in his hyperbolic praise of the Académie française as 'le foyer, le centre de tous les genres d'intellectualité et de distinction éminente' (LST, 94). However, Firmin had something more ambitious in mind when advocating for the increased cultivation of French in Haiti. Given the difficulties facing Haiti and the inadvisability of adopting English, the solution he prescribes is for Haitians to become so immersed in French as to master the language rather than be mastered by it:

> Nous devons donc nous intéresser à la culture de cette belle langue française, faite de clarté et de précision, mais dont on ne goûte bien la force et la délicatesse que par une étude attentive de toutes ses transformations philologiques et historiques (LST, 93).

Expertise of this kind transcends imitation. It implies a deep grasp of the language's historical development, rather than the mere emulation of stylistic models. Subsequently in the *Lettres*, Firmin offers his own exemplary philological

[158] Delorme 1870, pp. 182-3.
[159] Michelet 1981 [1860], p. 184.
[160] Pierre-Philippe Fraiture, *Past Imperfect: Time and African Decolonization, 1945-1960* (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2021), p. 154-5. The term *Francophonie* was coined in 1880 by Reclus in his geographical survey, *France, Algérie et colonies* (Paris: Hachette, 1886). Firmin's assessment of Haiti's linguistic makeup intriguingly seems to answer Reclus' own assessment of the country as divided between the 'idiome civilisé' of French and the 'patois créole, qui est un babillement de nourrice'. Reclus 1886, as quoted by Fraiture 2021, p. 156.
[161] For Reclus, the 'mission to francophonize' involved inducting the Other into a language conceived of as less primitive—less infantile—and more developed. Fraiture 2021, p. 156.

exploration, which is more disruptive of authority than its initial display of learnedness would suggest. By delving into past states of the language, Firmin hints at the role chance played in its development. His reference above to 'clarté' evokes a property of French long held to be a defining characteristic separating the language apart from lesser languages.[162] Yet his philological musings imply that the language could have followed a divergent path of development. This challenges a certain teleological view of French civilization as the triumphant outgrowth of the French nation (a conception Marr challenged with respect to Georgian and the Georgian nation) and prepares the ground for the argument that French is just as at home in Haiti as in the old metropole.[163]

Firmin's philological exploration takes the form of an open letter to the editor of the *Annales politiques et littéraires*, a weekly cultural magazine which had recently published a letter form a reader purporting to have made a 'trouvaille philologique' (LST, 100).[164] The discovery concerned the origin of the name for the Château de la Muette, a former royal hunting lodge situated in the Bois de Boulogne. The reader argued that the castle's name had nothing to do with muteness, but in fact should be read as 'la meute' (pack of hunting dogs) in accordance with changes in French orthography. Citing medieval textual instances of 'meute' being written as 'muete', the reader argued the case for updating the spelling of the building's name.[165] In his response, Firmin expands upon the reader's argument by going into the minutiae of the textual citations—he ruefully acknowledges that his letter may come across as 'fastidieuse' (LST, 106). Firmin points out that the reader's 'trouvaille' is cribbed off the entry for 'meute' in Émile Littré's *Dictionnaire de la*

[162] Cf. John Leavitt, *Linguistic Relativities: Language Diversity and Modern Thought* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011), p. 48.
[163] Firmin's non-teleological account of French perhaps recalls Broca's view that language is, contra Schleicher, not an organic entity governed by its own internal logic. See Piet Desmet, *La Linguistique naturaliste en France (1867-1922): Nature, origine et evolution du langage* (Leuven and Paris: Peeters, 1996), p. 176.
[164] Founded in 1883 by Jules Brisson (its editorship being taken on in 1895 by Jules' son Adolphe, the addressee of Firmin's letter), the *Annales politiques et littéraires* could best be described as a middle-brow review reflecting views on literature that were, by the end second decade of the twentieth century, far from cutting-edge. Cf. *Henri Gouhier se souvient…Ou comment on devient historien des idées*, ed. by Giulia Belgioioso and Marie-Louise Gouhier (Paris: Vrin, 2005), pp. 15-16.
[165] Letter quoted in Sergines [Adolphe Brisson], 'Les Échos de Paris', *Les Annales politiques et littéraires*, 3 February 1907, pp. 68-9. 'Sergines' was the pseudonym of Adolphe Brisson, son of the magazine's founder. Geneviève Hodin, '(Le fils de) Villon à l'Académie Française', *Revue Verlaine*, 13 (2015), 19-22 (p. 19).

*langue française*.[166] Firmin's letter is interesting not so much because of the details of the debate, but because of the comments he makes in passing. A digression on Littré, who in Firmin's eyes was a much better and more intellectually honest philologist than the reader of the *Annales*, brings us to Dante (Littré wrote a Medieval French translation of the *Divine Comedy*) and, from there, to Dante's teacher Brunetto Latini. While in political exile in Arras, this thirteenth-century Florentine wrote his encyclopaedic prose work *Li Livres dou Tresor* in the French vernacular of Picardie.[167] Firmin includes the following quotation from Brunetto Latini's text, which he regards as a 'bel éloge de la langue française' (LST, 105):

> Sau nous demande pourquoi chis livre est escris en romans, selon le patois de France, puisque nous somes Ytaliens, je diræ que c'est par II raisons, lune est parce que nos somes en France, l'autre si est parce que le françois est plus delitaubles langages et plus comuns que moult d'autres.[168]

Despite its innocuous appearance as part of a learned digression, this passage subtly challenges the teleological account of the French language as the French nation's great gift to global culture. The biographical circumstances of its author parallels Firmin's situation when compiling the *Lettres*: both were exiles, both were in some sense interlopers in the French language. Brunetto Latini is a supreme instance of linguistic mastery acquired through learning rather than by birth, and thus a useful instance for Firmin to cite while arguing for the cultivation of francophone excellence in Haiti. Both authors valued French because of its widespread use. More provocatively, this very early piece of vernacular French eloquence, rather than signalling a starting point for the triumphant march of French, confronts us with the historical contingency of the French language, not to mention the French nation. Brunetto Latini's citation, in the unmodernized form in which Firmin reproduces it, strikes the reader with its linguistic unfamiliarity, despite the text being nominally 'françois.' It confronts the reader with an unfamiliar version of French, exhibiting

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[166] For the entry on 'meute' from Littré's *Dictionnaire*, published 1873-7, see < https://www.littre.org/definition/meute > [Accessed 12 November 2021].
[167] Julia Bolton Holloway, *Twice-told Tales: Brunetto Latino and Dante Alighieri* (New York: Peter Lang, 1993), pp. 55-7.
[168] Brunetto Latini, *Li Livres dou Tresor*, ed. by P. Chabaille (Paris: Imprimerie impériale, 1863), p. 3; quoted in Firmin 1910, p. 105; as noted in the Chabaille edition, the version of the text with 'patois' as opposed to 'langage' or 'parleure' is the Rennes manuscript. Cf. Adolphe Granier de Cassagnac, *Histoire des origines de la langue française* (Paris: Firmin Didot, 1872), p. 213.

lexical and orthographic features which seems to share more in common with other Romance languages ('escris', 'moult'). The unfamiliarity it elicits is not simply the result of the text's age, but also a function of the genealogical indeterminacy of what ought to stand as an early progenitor of modern French. The emergence of modern French out of Brunetto Latini's language looks more like a result of chance than destiny. Indeed, according to Eugen Weber's famous study, 'French was a foreign language for a substantial number of Frenchmen' well into the second half of the nineteenth century.[169] In the terminology of the thirteenth and nineteenth centuries alike, France was a country of many regional 'patois.'[170] The term 'patois' carried derogatory connotations, particularly when applied to marginal languages such as Kreyòl.[171] An author other than Firmin may cite Brunetto Latini to argue that at one point French had the same low standing as Kreyòl. Firmin does not go so far; his aims are served by the suggestion, which Brunetto Latini's text raises, that the French language did not emerge out of a fully formed French nation, as the embodiment of the worldview of that culture alone.

It would be easy to overlook the significance of Firmin's philological intervention. Digressive and pernickety, his letter seems to pursue philological enquiry in the spirit of a parlour game. In acknowledging that 'les Français […] se passionnent toujours pour les questions de grammaire et d'étymologie', Firmin seems to deliberately trivialize his letter, reducing it to the level of middle-brow intellectual diversion typical of the *Annales*. Such an assessment, however, overlooks the more subversive challenge to authority which the discussion represents, particularly when viewed in the broader context of the *Lettres* as a whole. Linguistic descent, Firmin's text implies, is subject to chance. The consolidation of a national community around language is a latter-day, and highly contingent, phenomenon. Linguistic history does reveal patterns such as semi-regular changes in orthography. However, these patterns are only discernible in hindsight, and they are

[169] Eugen Weber, *Peasants into Frenchmen: The Modernization of Rural France, 1870-1914* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1976), p. 67

[170] Cassagnac, citing this very text, argues that it refers simply to 'local' languages without implication that it is derogatory. Cassagnac 1872, p. 213.

[171] 'The etymological origin of 'patois' reflects […] the assumption that dialects and patois lie on the wrong side of progress and modernity. In her book on linguistic exchanges in colonial Africa, Cécile Van den Avenne shows that the word stems, or rather is likely to stem, from the Old French verb *patoier* meaning 'to move one's hands, to gesticulate (to be understood)'. Fraiture 2021, p. 156; quoting Cécile Van den Avenne, *De la bouche même des indigènes. Echanges linguistiques en Afrique coloniale* (Paris: Vendémiaire, 2017), p. 268, n. 544.

generally not grasped by the lay speaker of the language. They are the province of the expert, or the elite intellectual. Philological enquiry, then, belongs to Firmin's cherished category of activities which are meritocratic; in other words, which are open to all gifted individuals irrespective of race or nationality.

If Firmin's praise of French signals a turn towards cultural difference, it nonetheless reprises a recurrent theme stretching across all his work. Firmin had long denied that race correlated to language and that biological descent was an accurate predictor of intellectual achievement in the individual. As we saw in Chapter 1, Firmin mobilized his own linguistic expertise in as a counterexample disproving the prejudice of black inferiority and extended his claim to mastery of French to the Haitian populace as a whole (ERH 193-5). In later writing, Firmin continued this strategy of deploying black eloquence to subvert the metropolitan French reader's expectations of what constitutes linguistic mastery. In 1901 he wrote the preface to an anthology of poems, published in Paris, by the Haitian writer Paul Lochard. Firmin introduces Lochard to the reader as 'un Haïtien et plus noir que blanc', whose 'mentalité est absolument nationale' owing to his never having left Haiti. Yet Lochard's skills with French makes him indistinguishable from a hypothetical 'poète français, issu du plus pur sang gaulois.'[172] In the preface to, Firmin offers up the Haitian poet as the answer to a syllogism:

> Mais si les langues et les idées d'une race peuvent être facilement adoptées et appropriées par une autre race, sous l'empire de circonstances particulières et contingentes, sans que l'assimilation ou l'absorption ait été réalisée sous aucun autre rapport, ne faudrait-il pas admettre qu'une intelligence commune, servie par des organes foncièrement identiques, fait de toutes les races humaines une espèce unique […]?[173]

The mere fact of the anthology's existence is presented as proof that human intelligence is everywhere the same. By contrast, Firmin's claim in the *Lettres* is that certain languages are especially suited to conveying certain kinds of concept and

[172] Anténor Firmin, 'Préface', in *Les Feuilles de chêne* by Paul Lochard (Paris: Ateliers haïtiens, 1901), pp, 7-22 (p. 9). Dash likewise reads Firmin's preface to Lochard's anthology as an instance of 'performative cosmopolitanism' which challenges 'the whole issue of identity and authenticity'. Dash 2004, pp. 47-8. Firmin had included Lochard in *De l'Égalité* among a catalogue of Haitian writers who are 'griffes', i.e. children of one black and one mulatto parent (1885, p. 316).
[173] Ibid, p. 9.

that, through a happy coincidence, Haitians possess a language which is well suited to their temperament and intellectual needs. A common thread across all his writings, however, is the celebration of individual talent over inherited traditions or collective identity. While arguing that French is suited to the Haitian national character, Firmin also wants to argue that true virtue is achieved through the efforts and talents of the individual. We see this in his peremptory rejection of communism because 'le collectivisme ou le communisme n'ont rien à faire avec la vertu, qui est une qualité individuelle et non collective.' 'La vertu (*virtus*),' Firmin argues, 'est la force ou l'énergie indispensable à toute action émancipatrice ou progressive. C'est seulement dans l'individu que cette énergie, matérielle ou morale, se manifeste en pleine réalité' (LST, 259). Firmin's individualist convictions made it impossible for him to endorse collective action in the name of overcoming social inequality, arguably predisposing him to the naively technocratic belief that racial prejudice could be engineered out of society through education. By the same measure, his disregard for collective identity led him to oppose the view that culture is governed by the mechanisms of human heredity. It also led him to a conception of language in relation to nationality which was strikingly similar to Marr. Marr may have been inclined to treat linguistic and cultural developments as the result of collective cultural efforts; however, the collective was not constituted along ethnic lines. This is evident in his concluding remarks about Georgian, in which he evokes the figure of the ideal Georgian speaker, who is not an embodiment of purity of lineage but rather a skilful wielder of the full breadth of the language's resources, which include multiple 'tribal' and 'social' registers:

> The Georgian national language does not shy away from any one of these elements; the Georgian through his very nature unites them within himself, with the tact of an intelligent member of a cultured society, possessing the ability to deploy every element at the appropriate moment […].[174]

This is a rare moment in Marr's writings in which the individual speaker, albeit a hypothetical one, is brought to the fore. It is a sentiment with which Firmin may well have concurred. As he wrote in *De l'Égalité*, what defines a language is not its

[174] Marr 1922b, p. 22.

hereditary philological material but the pragmatic use it is put to by those who wield it:

> C'est la pensée qui imprime à la parole ce caractère élevé, supérieur entre tous, et dont l'homme est si légitiment fier. Pour qu'une langue se perfectionne, il suffit que les peuples qui la parlent aient grandi en conscience et en intelligence, en savoir et en dignité. Il en est de même de l'individu. C'est pourquoi l'expression de Ciceron, *vir bonus dicendi peritus* [a good man, skilled in speaking], sera éternellement vrai (ERH, 195).

## 2.6 Conclusion

Firmin's political career revealed the benefits and risks of making culture relevant to development. Haiti faced comparable challenges on the international stage to its neighbours, the independent states of the Spanish Americas. These countries had mobilized shared cultural traits to define a distinct geopolitical sphere over which the United States could hold no legitimate influence. They had seemingly solved the problem of how to be modern without needing to catch up to the United States. Notwithstanding its many failures in holding back U.S. economic and political influence, the ideology of *latinidad* had helped define a common cultural project for writers from across the Spanish Americas, and Firmin looked enviously upon the cultural autonomy from imperial powers old and new that it accorded to the countries that fell inside its purview. However, *latinidad* yoked culture with ethnicity, and Firmin could not accept this constellation once he realized its implications for Haiti and for Afrodescendants more generally. Although it repudiated many of the old concepts of racial difference, the discourse of *latinidad* was grounded in a belief that national integrity must be achieved through demographic fusion. This was inevitably hostile towards Afrodescendants, even when an explicitly biological programme of whitening was not being advocated. The cultural programme of *latinidad* having been rendered inadmissible, Firmin needed to find another strategy for justifying Haitians' legitimacy in using French. Firmin had little faith in the existence of a teleological process, rooted in sociological consolidation, capable of forging a genuine national culture. He had to prescribe a

conscious and deliberate engagement with the French language in Haiti because, unlike his contemporaries in the Spanish Americas, he could not claim that the centre of gravity of the old metropolitan language had shifted westwards. Firmin's exemplary philological investigation illustrated the level of intellectual engagement with the language he expected of his compatriots. Moreover, Firmin's philological investigation served to challenge the existence the teleology France's emergence as a nation by revealing the role played by chance in the development of its language.

Firmin's suggestion that a language's longevity is partly a matter of chance and that its genius owes nothing to the ethnic composition of its speakers invites a parallel with Marr. In a lecture on Georgian, which had come to function as the preeminent *lingua franca* of the Caucasus, Marr explained how the language offered a 'chronological perspective down to the depths of time,' in which the different layers of its history still maintain 'relations' with one another.[175] However, he was quick to point out that this property of Georgian was not due to any innate superiority of the language or its speakers, even if its longevity marked it out from Armenian, a language whose 'ancient literary and contemporary (varieties) are two completely different languages: although they are related to one another, the degree of separation between them is comparable in the most favourable case to that between Russian and Polish, yet in the majority of cases the separation is greater still.'[176] The continuous development of Georgian, Marr explained, was a matter of chance. It was certainly not a question of the language having preserved its purity through time: if anything, the success of Georgian stemmed from the fact that it was 'not of single nature [ne edinoprirodna]' but had been modified by many ethnic groups over the course of its existence, many of which used Georgian as their second language.[177] Marr used his historical reading of Georgian—across the various stages of its diachronic development—to oppose modern-day conceptions of linguistic purity and the belief that languages and ethnicities correspond in a stable manner across time.[178] This represented a similar conception of language, as a complex

[175] Nikolaj Marr, *K izučeniju sovremennogo gruzinskogo jazyka* (Petrograd: Institut Živykh Vostočnykh Jazykov, 1922b), p. 14.
[176] Ibid, p. 14.
[177] Ibid, p. 5.
[178] Indeed, according to Marr, literary Georgian has its source in the language of the the Svano-Meskhetian or Somekhian people, whose closest modern relatives are the Svan, inhabitants of the mountains in the upper reaches of the Ingur and Tskhenistsqali rivers'. Ibid, p. 15.

evolving structure bearing the traces of multiple influences across time, to Firmin's treatment of French in the *Lettres*. Other aspects of Marr's thought cannot be so easily correlated to Firmin. Marr thought that language and material culture could be used to reconstitute the presence of the specific creative community which gave rise to them. He was, moreover, particularly favourably disposed to 'autochthonous' artistic processes—to those which, as in Martí's evocation of Cubanness, sprang from the indigenous soil. The tensions inherent to Marr's view of the communal basis of artistic and linguistic creativity form the subject of the next chapter.

## Chapter 3. Artistic Forms and Organic Communities: Marr and the German Apostles of Cultural Difference

### 3.1 Introduction

Despite Marr's efforts to explain the evolution of language in terms of a set of abstract laws, he never ceased viewing languages (in the plural) as embodying the creative energy of specific groups of people historically. However abstract his theories became, Marr continued to discern the presence of the 'people'—the 'Volk', and all that this heavily freighted term implied–which lay behind linguistic phenomena, even if these linguistic phenomena could be adequately accounted for as the expression of regular phonetic and semantic laws. Marr's interest in language was not subordinate to geopolitical concerns in quite the same manner as Firmin; nonetheless, he thought that the proper study of linguistic and cultural phenomena served the cause of putting marginalized communities on the map. Throughout his career, Marr continued to champion the role played by Japhetic peoples in the creation of European culture. Although they became marginalized by the 'emergence of the Greeks and Romans in the North, and […] the Egyptians and Semites in the South', the Japhetites, Marr argued, made such a major contribution that any historical account of European languages would be condemned to failure which did not take them into account.[1] Counteracting the unjust obscurity which had befallen the Japhetites required gathering evidence of the role played by Japhetic peoples in the past and the continued vitality of their modern-day counterparts, such as the Basques, Abkhaz, and Chuvash—three minority groups which enjoyed Marr's special attention because of the uniqueness of their linguistic contributions. Hence the reconciliation of linguistic difference within the single global process of language formation, achieved at a theoretical level in Marr's *Stammbaum*, needed to be achieved concretely by recuperating the human presence, in modern times and the primordial past, from behind the linguistic traces.

[1] Marr [1922]d, pp. 2-3, 13.

This tendency to coordinate the formal analysis of languages with an ethnographic enquiry into the communities which used them became, if anything, more pronounced after Marr abandoned his genetic approach to Japhetic languages and introduced his global glottogonic theory because these shifts in his thinking coincided with the rise of Soviet nation building, a political process in which Marr himself was actively involved.[2] Unlike other projects of political federation which were born out of nineteenth-century thought, the Soviet Union was actually established as a state, and its leaders were faced with the task of forging unity out of the ethnically and linguistically variegated population it inherited from the tsarist empire. A significant challenge facing the Bolsheviks stemmed from their need to respect ethnographic difference while aspiring to a post-national society. An important early Soviet policy known as *korenizacija* sought to promote representatives from indigenous peoples ('korennye narody') to leadership positions within their respective republics.[3] Although at one level this policy embraced the nationalist principle that inherited cultural identity legitimizes claims to territorial exclusivity—the term *korenicacija* unavoidably calls to mind ideas of lineage and the soil, as it is derived from *koren'* (root)—it also sought to integrate ethnic minorities into the union-wide professional, education and bureaucratic structures through the promotion of elite national cadres to high offices of state, the harmonization of professional qualifications, and the expansion of Russian-language fluency enabled by universal education.[4] The inclusion of formerly oppressed peoples within the structure of the state required that the defining markers of their difference—language, ethnicity, custom—be studied and codified, and this task fell to established academics such as Marr.[5] There was always a tension in Soviet nationality policy between a drive to minimize difference and a drive to accentuate

[2] For Marr's involvement in earl Soviet censuses, including his admonition that nationality (nacional'nost') 'could not be extrapolated from 'blood, territory or physiological type,' but was a reflection of group consciousness', see Francine Hirsch, *Empire of Nations: Ethnographic Knowledge and the Making of the Soviet Union* (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 2005), p.110. Hirsch is citing minutes from a census subcommission meeting in 1924.
[3] Martin 2001, pp. 10-12.
[4] Martin notes correctly that the etymology of *korenizacija* is not derived directly from *koren'* (2001, pp. 10-12), although it should be said that the echoes of the latter word are strong enough for scholars to gloss *korenizacija* as 'literally, 'taking root' or indigenization'. Yuri Slezkine, 'The USSR as a Communal Apartment, or How a Socialist State promoted Ethnic Particularism', *Slavic Review*, 53.2 (1994), 414-452 (p. 433).
[5] On the unlikely alliance between Bolshevik revolutionaries and the academicians, see Hirsch 2005, pp. 21-4.

it. This duality was reflected in Marr's work, in the irreducibility of linguistic variety it enshrined and in Marr's hostility to scholars who separated language families behind 'Chinese walls', as seen in Chapter 1.[6] This chapter will examine how these ambiguities played out in Marr's work in the light of his ideological commitments to placing marginalized communities on the map through the study of their language and art. Placing people on the map through their culture carries the risk that the people in question are reduced to an ethno-racial stereotype and that their cultural products come to be treated as the direct reflection of this essential (biological) type. We can anticipate some of these pitfalls by casting a glance back to José Martí, who claimed that authentic culture is 'autochthonous', deriving its legitimacy from the biological lineage of its practitioners and their primordial bond with the soil. Marr as we shall see in this chapter also valued cultural production which was rooted to its native soil; however, he also came to the realization that no matter how rooted a culture is in place, there is no guarantee that its practitioners remain ethnically consistent across time.

Marr's continued articulation of a connection between 'the people' and their cultural production—primarily but not exclusively in the form of language—places him in dialogue with the philosophy of German Romanticism, a tradition which informed Soviet ethnography via its own nineteenth-century underpinnings. Since the eighteenth century, many German philosophers opposed the rationality and universalism of Enlightenment and celebrated cultural difference instead. Comprising what the historian Isaiah Berlin termed 'Counter-Enlightenment', these thinkers saw language and literature as the reflection of the collective Spirit of the people and argued that cultures could not be judged against an abstract ideal but could only be understood on their own terms. They feared that greater rationalization and uniformity would lead to a loss of the world's cultural diversity, a sentiment Marr also shared, and that spiritual renewal lay in the primitive layers of society, in the peasantry which was still in touch with the soil and the rhythms of time.[7] Herder thought that art was authentic when it expressed communal life, exemplified by pre-modern societies in which the individual is 'organically embedded' in the

[6] Marr [1927], p. 32.
[7] For a discussion of Marr's evocation of peasant labour in his theory of language origins, see Katerina Clark, *Petersburg: Crucible of Cultural Revolution* (Cambridge MA: Harvard University Press, 1995), pp. 215-6.

community.[8] The German Romantic association between collective culture and primitive society informed the early Soviet sense that, to incorporate the lowest social strata within national life, one must acknowledge the distinguishing traits of their culture, and above all their language.[9] Wilhelm von Humboldt, a writer whose theorizing on the origin of language and contributions to Basque philology anticipated Marr by a century, argued that 'the nation's language is its spirit and its spirit is its language'.[10] For Humboldt, differences of culture and language need to be respected as separate but equally valid expressions of human nature.[11] Another German Romantic thinker, Johann Gottfried Herder, thought that each society possessed its own unique worldview which was not 'commensurable' to that of another society, and that to judge which one is 'nearer to the universal human ideal, *Humanität*, even subjectively conceived' is ultimately meaningless.[12] Herder wrote a famous and still anthologized plaidoyer for the study of World Literature as a 'pretty, colourful meadow' comprising the multitude of national traditions, 'each flourish[ing] in its own position in the divine order', in which 'the Arab and the crusader' are allotted equal space.[13] Thus for Herder, human societies are all alike in producing literature, but each does so according to its own national character. This sentiment has an echo in Marr's insistence that, even though global linguistic evolution is a unified process, the single world language which will eventually result from it will be the fruit of a creative collaboration between all peoples and must be constructed 'in strict adherence to the principle of national self-determination'; that is to say, the single world language must respect and retain the full gamut of human linguistic variety from all across the world.[14]

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[8] Frederick M. Barnard, *Herder on Nationality, Humanity, and History* (Montreal and Ithaca, NY: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2003), p. 57.
[9] See Clark on writers such as the folklorist Vladimir Propp: 'This faith in the power of the language of the proletariat is a sort of analogue to the Romantic cult of the "folk" in the German 1820s.' Clark 195, p. 234.
[10] Wilhelm von Humboldt, *Humanist without Portfolio: An Anthology of the Writings of Wilhelm von Humboldt*, trans. by Marianne Cowan (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1963), p. 277.
[11] For Humboldt, 'Humanity' as a totality could be grasped empirically rather than aprioristically, following a comparison of the 'character' of each individual human collective as manifest in language and culture: Jürgen Trabant, *Traditionen Humboldts* (Frankfurt a. M.: Suhrkamp, 1990), pp. 50-59.
[12] Isaiah Berlin, *Three Critics of the Enlightenment: Vico, Hamann, Herder* (Princeton and Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2000), pp. 236-7.
[13] Johann Gottfried Herder, 'Results of a Comparison of Different Peoples' Poetry in Ancient and Modern Times', trans. by Jan Kueveler, in *The Princeton Sourcebook in Comparative Literature: From the European Enlightenment to the Global Present*, ed. by David Damrosch, Natalie Melas, Mbongiseni Buthelezi (Princeton and Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2009), pp. 3-9 (pp. 4, 6-7).
[14] Marr 1925b, p. 1014.

The Humboldtian and Herderian approach lived on well into the period of Marr's career, influencing scholars working on all areas of human creative endeavour, from archaeology to art history. Scholars in this German tradition continued to interpret cultural production as the expression of a collective worldview, in accordance with the principle that national rather than individual genius confers meaning on art. This meant that the individual object of literary work under consideration did not have to supply its own meaning; rather, it became coherent within the context of the collective tradition which produced it and which it, in turn, helped elucidate. The advantage of this approach was that it freed art historians from only studying individual masterpieces by known artists. Instead, scholars could now study fragmentary objects, including artifacts from the distant past, which became legible by being interpreted as part of a collective tradition. It also became possible to relativize the importance of the individual artistic genius and approach the role of collective, artisanal practice in artistic production.[15] This approach was appealing to Marr, whose practice as a linguist consisted of gathering and interpreting linguistic fragments. Moreover, it appealed to him in his capacity as an archaeologist and scholar of artistic traditions which lay beyond the remit of the classical tradition and the Renaissance.

Despite its capacity for opening new avenues of research, the German Romantic tradition carried the risk of treating the collective tradition as timeless, static, racially or ethnically defined, and closed to outside influence. The Humboldtian vision of language as the expression of collective genius informed scholars in other fields who treated cultural artifacts as indices of timeless national identity, especially when it came to recuperating Germanness from obscurity.[16] Later in the nineteenth century, a new cultural and political current emerged which associated collective artistic tradition with biological ethno-racial identity: the populist *völkisch* movement, which claimed the continuous existence of Germanness stretching from prehistory to the modern era and emphasized 'the central

[15] The Viennese art historian Alois Riegl, for instance, made strides in using a collective approach to artistic production as a means of recuperating traditions which had been overlooked thus far; in Riegl's case, the category of 'Late Roman' art. Jaś Elsner, 'The Viennese Invention of Late Antiquity: Between Politics and Religion in the Forms of Late Roman Art', in *Empires of Faith in Late Antiquity: Histories of Art and Religion from India to Ireland*, ed. by Jaś Elsner (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2020), pp. 110-27 (p. 113).
[16] Bernard Mees, *The Science of the Swastika* (Budapest and New York: Central European University Press, 2008), p. 72.

significance of nature and landscape, history and indigenousness, heritage and blood'.[17] Even scholars who were not directly engaged in this Pan-Germanist mythmaking, but were instead studying cultural domains outside of Europe, were liable to create a hypostasized version of the collective.[18] Indeed, Marr himself was not immune from this. Even in his most theoretically elaborate writings, which were a significant departure from his earlier and more recognizably Romantic work on Armeno-Georgian philology, collective agency in linguistic and artistic production remained central to his thinking.

Marr's interaction with German cultural discourse was the anvil on which he forged his ideas about demotic creativity. Over time he moved away from a paradigm borrowed from German thinkers, in which immutable ethno-national difference was treated as the cause of cultural particularism, to a new conception which allowed him to treat cultural and linguistic difference as the result of formal laws which, though unfolding universally, did not foster uniformity but variety. Thus, there was no longer a requirement for immutable ethnic identity to serve as a guarantor for the preservation of cultural variety. Additionally, although Marr continued to view art and language as the fruits of collective activity, he found a way to talk about collective artistic agency without defining it in narrowly ethno-racial terms. This chapter will examine Marr in the context of the German scholarly milieux which shaped his work and will consider how successfully he was able to conceive of the artistic collective without reducing it to timeless and essential terms. This will first involve situating Marr within the ferment of ideas which characterized German scholarship at the turn of the twentieth century. Marr had significant scholarly connections with Germany, and as a polemicist attacking the traditional centres of linguistic authority, he strongly resembled certain writers from Germany and Austria who attacked the legacy of classical humanism. One of these writers, the Austrian art historian Josef Strzygowski, will be discussed in depth alongside Marr. Similarly complex and controversial to Marr, Strzygowski pioneered the study of

[17] Andrew G. Whiteside, *The Socialism of Fools: Georg Ritter von Schönerer and Austrian Pan-Germanism* (Berkely, Los Angeles, London: University of California Press, 1975), p. 44.
[18] Fritz Stern's case study the art historian Julius Langbehn illustrates how 'völkisch' thought came to be applied to other areas of cultural history. Fritz Stern, *The Politics of Cultural Despair: A Study in the Rise of Germanic Ideology* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1961), pp. 97-115. Also cited by Suzanne L. Marchand, 'The Rhetoric of Artifacts and the Decline of Classical Humanism: The Case of Josef Strzygowski', *History and Theory*, 3 (1994), 106-130 (p. 111).

many overlooked artistic traditions of Europe and the Near East. A direct comparison between the two writers and their interpretation of Armenian architectural history will form the subsequent section of this chapter. The comparison will allow us to address a key ambiguity in Marr's work: in foregrounding the demotic origins of cultures, he came close to advocating the kind of organicist conception of community exemplified by figures such as José Martí, to restate an example from Chapter 2. Marr even echoes Martí in making 'autochthony' central to his view of cultural vitality: establishing the 'avtokhtonnost'' of certain primitive inhabitants of the Mediterranean was a goal he pursued in his *Japhetic Caucasus*.[19] Marr eventually distanced himself from the attempt to determine an order of priority over territory based on primordial ethnic claims. In so doing, however, he retained the concept of the primitive community, but contrived to make it unidentifiable with any fixed ethnic group.

## 3.2 Marr's German Influences and Reception

Marr's sustained engagement with German scholarship acquainted him with state-of-the-art linguistic work, including an abundance of research on Caucasian languages in Germany and Austria which was unique for Western Europe, but also brought him into contact with an important current of polemical cultural theory. His scholarly coming-of-age coincided with a tumultuous time in German scholarship and culture, in which traditional centres of authority were challenged, and alternative kinds of intellectual dissemination astride and beyond the university gained importance. The study of the classical world, centred on Greece and Rome, had been enshrined in German academic culture. However, the growth of these universities had also created 'a battalion of para-academic outsiders' who saw the old classicist paradigms as having exhausted themselves and produced works which, in the words of the intellectual historian Suzanne Marchand, 'exposed the fragility of Mediterranean civilization and the superficiality of its tenure.'[20] This is a thesis which Marr himself pursued in his *Japhetic Caucasus and the Third Ethnic Element in the Formation of*

[19] Marr [1920], p. 112.
[20] Marchand, 1994, p. 107.

*Mediterranean Culture* (1920), a pamphlet exploring Europe's indigenous pre-Indo-European culture which was first published in Leipzig. This section will explore Marr's connection to the world of polemical anti-classical German scholarship, composed of the following figures discussed by Marchand: prehistorian Gustaf Kossinna, Anglo-German political philosopher Houston Stewart Chamberlain, Africanist Leo Frobenius.[21] Frobenius is chiefly remembered for his concept of the 'Kulturkreis' which described the diffusion of cultural forms from their point of origin outwards through imitation and degradation by less ingenious peoples.[22] Josef Strzygowski, for Marchand the quintessential figure embodying these tendencies, will be discussed subsequently. Although these writers were arguably the product of the breakdown of intellectual hierarchies, in many respects they followed the Humboldtian and Herderian imperative of valorising cultural difference, particularly in the form of marginalized peoples. They did not comprise a cohesive or self-conscious movement but, rather, reflected a general intellectual mood which was modulated by their 'outsider' status on the fringes of academia and unencumbered by the constraints of scholarly decorum.[23] One key aspect of their thought was that they attributed the coherence of cultural traditions to the identity of the *Volk*, which came to be defined in more strongly racialized terms during this period. Their interest in unfamiliar cultures from exotic lands and from the distant past combined a reverence for organically cohesive societies and a rejection of empires, such as Rome, which they saw as cutting against the grain of legitimate *völkisch* identities. Marr too celebrated the fall of Europe's classical hegemon and echoed this intellectual mood in other important respects.

Numerous thinkers on the periphery challenged the centrality of classical civilization in the interests of cultural plurality. Firmin's attempt in *De l'Égalité* to establish the black origins of Egyptian civilization despite what he saw as willed ignorance on the part of Europeans ('ce peuple Egyptien n'était pas de race blanche comme l'esprit de système et un orgueil rétrospectif l'ont continuellement affirmé',

[21] Ibid, p. 111, f. 11.
[22] Paul A. Erickson and Liam D. Murphy, *A History of Anthropological Theory*, 3rd edn (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2008), p. 58.
[23] I follow Marchand in using the term 'outsider'. Marchand also uses the colourful term 'academic Grub Street' to refer to the marginalization of this cohort of writers who were 'pressed by their elders into the specialized pursuits of an increasingly positivistic historiography and frequently employed in the sub-professional tasks of cataloging, collecting, and authenticating'. Marchand 1994, p. 107. This term is highly evocative but unwieldy in the present thesis.

ERH, 336) also entailed his relativizing the importance of Greece in world civilization:

> En regardant la longue perspective du passé, bien au-delà des temps héroïques de la Grèce où naquit notre culture spécialement européenne, nous remontons de siècle en siècle, jusqu'aux âges ou s'élevèrent les pyramides, jusqu'à ceux où la première charrue laboura les terres grasses délaissées par le Nil. C'est en Égypte que nous retrouvons les plus anciens documents de l'histoire précise (ERH, 375).

Similarly, in a famous passage from 'Nuestra América', Martí evoked the centrality of Greece to make his claim for the autonomy of American culture:

> The history of America from the Incas to the present must be taught in its smallest detail, even if the Greek Archons go untaught. Our own Greece is preferable to the Greece that is not ours; we need it more.[24]

Firmin, Martí, and Marr were all attempting to define a polycentric world containing multiple equal histories of culture and civilization. However, a key differentiating feature between these attempts, and those of other scholars, is the importance given to ethnic or racial difference in maintaining the autonomy of separate spheres of culture and in determining the forms taken by them.

Rejecting the established classical tradition had many dimensions for the German outsider scholars with whom Marr interacted. It entailed a rejection of the exclusive study of Latin and Greek philology, and indeed the hierarchy which privileged written authorities over material artifacts.[25] In the study of visual arts it meant a rejection of the Renaissance celebration of individual genius, exemplified by Giorgio Vasari's biographical approach to art history, in favour of an approach which treated stylistic traits as the expression of collective creativity or the product of the working processes of artisan communities.[26] In a more ideologically charged

[24] Martí [1891]a, p. 291.
[25] Ibid, p. 112.
[26] Marina Dmitrieva, 'Josef Strzygowski und Russland', in *Von Biala nach Wien: Josef Strzygowski und die Kunstwissenschaften*, ed. by Piotr Otto Scholz and Magdalena Anna Długosz (Vienna: European University Press, 2015), pp. 151-174 (p. 168); cf. Suzanne Marchand 'Appreciating the Art of Others: Josef Strzygowski and the Austrian Origins of Non-Western Art History', ibid, pp.257-285 (p. 266); Margaret Olin, *Forms of Representation in Alois Riegl's Theory of Art* (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1992), p. 68.

form, this saw a foregrounding of folk art, demotic art, art that was connected to the soil-bound masses and the cycles of the working year. Along with the cultural achievements of ancient Rome and the humanist turn of the Renaissance, another 'Southern' or 'Mediterranean' source of authority under attack was the dominance of the Catholic Church. Many of these para-intellectuals were adherents of the Pan-Germanist 'Los von Rom' ('Away from Rome') movement which sought to spread Protestantism or reform Catholicism in a manner more attuned to the cultural roots of the Germanic lands.[27] Rome was seen as a hegemonic power exerting disproportionate influence over Germany and Austria, running roughshod over Germanic cultural identity. Pan-Germanism, by contrast was seen as offering a legitimate confederating structure, in contrast to the illegitimacy of Catholicism.[28] This tendency among these thinkers to define culture in broad geographical terms was also related to their belief in racial determinism. Despite the earnest insistence of many respected scholars that 'Indo-European language' did not imply the existence of 'Indo-European races', these voices from the establishment were beginning to be drowned out by popular and para-academic writers who promoted the study of language as essentially the province of race theory.[29] In the newly emerging academic field of archaeology, the Berlin professor Gustaf Kossinna attempted to use his discipline to prove the foundational role of the *Germanen* (proto-Germans) in prehistory.[30] His theses about German racial superiority were inspired by Gobineau, as was H.S. Chamberlain's *Grundlagen des 19. Jahrhunderts*, a sprawling work which purported to uncover the hidden role of the *Germanen* in all European cultural creation.[31] Chamberlain's overt anti-Semitism was an extreme but by no means isolated expression of a belief in Aryan supremacy common to many outsider intellectuals.[32]

[27] Marchand 1994, p. 119, citing Whiteside 1975, pp. 205-10, 243-62.
[28] Ibid, p. 246.
[29] Römer 1985, pp. 63-64.
[30] Mees 2008, pp. 76-78.
[31] Houston Stewart Chamberlain, *Grundlagen des 19. Jahrhunderts*, 8th edn, 2 vols (Munich: Bruckmann, 1907), I, p. 7. Both Kossinna and Chamberlain were in the orbit of Gobineau's most prolific German acolyte, Ludwig Schemann; Heinz Grünert, *Gustaf Kossinna (1858-1931): Vom Germanisten zum Prähistoriker; Ein Wissenschaftler im Kaiserreich und in der Weimarer Republik* (Rahden/Westf.: Leidorf, 2002), pp. 240-2. Cf. also Marchand 1994, p. 108.
[32] Indeed, Whiteside concludes his study of Austrian Pan-Germanism by surveying the constellation of primordialist racial doctrines at the turn of the twentieth century, in which Chamberlain was one of several figures. Whiteside 1975, pp. 323-4.

Given Marr's criticisms of scientific racism, it may seem surprising to associate him with this cohort. He would, for instance, condemn Chamberlain's conception of '"racial" difference ["rasovoe" različenie] between languages' as a typically bourgeois and Eurocentric perspective.[33] Yet Marr's uncommon areas of expertise and opposition to the major avatars of Western European dominance, such as Indo-European linguistics and Roman Catholicism, brought him into alignment with these scholars in matters of culture if not race. Marr echoed their condemnation of illegitimate forms of rule, in which cultural uniformity is achieved by making local practice conform to the values of the metropole. This reflected his intellectual upbringing and exposure to the great conundrum facing liberal-minded academics in Russia of how to legitimize the empire's rule over its ethnically and linguistically heterogenous subjects. The solution for many lay in acknowledging the incommensurateness of cultural difference, as per German Romanticism, while identifying confederating forces in history and geography which bound the empire's nationalities in a single destiny. In the second half of the nineteenth century, Russian ethnographers attempted to reconceptualize the empire along pluri-national lines, as comprising not simply a privileged Russian nation but many individual *narodnosti* or *narody*—Völker in the Herderian sense—each possessing a distinct Spirit expressed in its language and customs.[34] They argued that the empire should embrace the cultural differences of its native populations, a move which would placate demands for separatism by accommodating minority groups within a pluralistic and non-exclusionary version of Russian identity.[35] Marr contributed to these efforts of legitimizing the Russian Empire through its ability to accommodate cultural difference, in contrast to other European Great Powers. In the early phases of his career, Marr regarded Eastern Christianity (of which Orthodoxy is a subset) as a confederating historical force within the empire and beyond its borders, in the Near Eastern lands over which Russia traditionally claimed the status of protector.[36] In

[33] Marr [1924]b, p. 1.
[34] Hirsch 2005, pp. 36-8.
[35] Ibid, pp. 32-3.
[36] The role of cultural stewardship in the Holy Land in Russia's imperial programme can be seen in the founding of the Imperial Orthodox Palestine Society 1882, against a backdrop of recent Russo-Ottoman conflict. See I. A. Vorob'eva, *Russkie missii v Svjatoj zemle v 1847-1917 godakh* (Moscow: Institut vostokovedenija RAN, 2001), p. 82. Marr was a member of the Society. Ibid, pp. 120, 142.

1912 he co-founded a scholarly journal entitled *Khristianskij Vostok* ('The Christian East') which, as its opening editorial statement put it, sought to

> encompass all the nations [narodnosti] of the East (Semitic, Japhetic, Hamitic, Indo-European etc.) irrespective of their confessional shade (be they Orthodox, Monophysite, or Nestorian etc.) as well as all forms of spiritual life (the Church, law, art, literature), not only from a purely historical perspective, but in connection with the present, insofar as the latter furthers our understanding of history.[37]

The journal's editors thereby identified Christianity as a common thread uniting the 'East' and transcending all ethnic and doctrinal divisions. Erstwhile antagonists in debates over the nature of Christ, such as the (Orthodox) Russian and Georgian churches, the (Monophysite) Armenian Apostolic Churches, and the (Nestorian) Assyrian Church, were reconciled but pitted against a common enemy in the West: Marr and his co-editors pitched the journal as an urgently needed consolidation of Russian scholarship in the face of Western efforts to achieve 'religious, political and economic predominance over the East', which served a Roman Catholic agenda.[38] These writers were mobilizing the idea of the Russian Empire as coinciding with a group of peoples whose histories were organically intertwined. As well as sharing a common enemy, Russian reformist ethnographers and German outsider scholars, including the members of the 'Los von Rom' movement, contrasted the legitimacy of indigenous culture with the tyranny of alien imported cultures which served the interests of foreign powers.

In subsequent years, Marr's linguist writings emphasized the importance of indigenous peoples, of cultures bound by a primordial link to the soil, in a manner which resonated with outsider German cultural theory. For this reason, it is worth briefly revisiting his work on linguistic substrates discussed in Chapter 1 as it was here that he first formulated his opposition between autochthonous Japhetic peoples and Indo-European late-arrivals. The premise of the substrate theory, adopted by Marr from other linguists, was that when a conquering people entered a new domain and subjugated its inhabitants, as occurred during the 'Völkerwanderung' (the theory

[37] V. N. Beneševič, N. Ja. Marr, and B. A. Turaev, 'Ot redakcii', *Khristianskij Vostok,* 1 (1912), 1-5, (p.3).
[38] Ibid, p. 2.

of Rome's violent fall at the hands of Germanic invaders) or the original migration of Indo-European peoples from their 'Urheimat', the language of the conquered may well be driven to extinction but will nonetheless exert a covert influence on the phonology and lexicon of the language of the conqueror.[39] Indeed, features of such languages as Latin and Greek could only be accounted for through the influence of, respectively, an Etruscan or Pelasgian 'substrate'. These and other instances of substrate influence explained developments within individual Indo-European languages which did not conform to the otherwise regular developmental process described by Indo-European sound laws ('Lautgesetze').

Research on substrates could be conducted simply in the spirit of tying up loose ends in Indo-European linguistics, but it could also serve to reconstruct the imagined lost cultural world of primitive Europe. The latter tendency predominated in Marr's work. In his *Japhetic Caucasus* he claimed to have proved the existence of a 'third' non-Semitic, non-Indo-European 'ethnic element' in European prehistory which represented 'the foundation of Mediterranean culture, the historical hearth of global cultural formation'.[40] Marr viewed his research on Japhetic languages as forming part of a broader effort to restore the integrity of Europe's indigenous population which had fallen into obscurity after the Indo-European migration. The same claims were made in other quarters about the prehistoric Germans and their overlooked significance as the originators of European civilization. Oscar Montelius, a Swedish prehistorian and important influence on Kossinna, drew on craniometry and the remains of flint tools to argue for the uninterrupted settlement of Scandinavia by its first inhabitants, the Proto-Germanic peoples, who settled the region after the last ice age.[41] Although later contact with the migrating Indo-European peoples and the languages they brought with them transformed the *Germanen* into *Indogermanen*, their basic ethnic composition as Northern European natives remained unchanged by these events: it was the Germanic element which mattered,

[39] On the origin and cultural resonance of the 'Völkerwanderung' hypothesis, see Bryan Ward-Perkins, *The Fall of Rome and the End of Civilization* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), pp. 5-7. On the Indo-European migration hypotheses, see Colin Renfrew, *Archaeology and Language: The Puzzle of Indo-European Origins* (London: Jonathan Cape, 1987), pp. 14-15.
[40] Nikolaj Marr, 'Jafetičeskij Kavkaz i tretij ėtničeskij ėlement v sozidanii Sredizemnomorskoj kul'tury' [1920], *Izbrannye raboty*, I (1933), pp. 79-124 (p. 94).
[41] Oscar Montelius, 'Die Vorfahren der Germanen', *Mannus: Zeitschrift für Vorgeschichte*, X (1918), 64-70 (p. 69); Römer 1985, p. 100.

and which was responsible for such an illustrious rollcall of cultural achievements.[42] Marr had no interest in craniometry—in distinguishing, in the manner of Montelius and Kossinna, between superior 'dolichocephalic' and inferior 'brachycephalic' peoples—and viewed the Mediterranean basin and not the North as the true European heartland. Yet, much like these students of Germanic prehistory, Marr advocated strongly that greater scholarly attention be paid to the indigenous local origins of European culture instead of seeking the sources of the continent's civilization exclusively in foreign lands and their migratory peoples. It was the indigenous Japhetic peoples which Marr wanted to see credited as the original 'architects' of European culture.[43] His scholarly project can be compared to the historical revisionism of writers such as Kossinna, who attempted to rewrite European history from the 'barbarian' perspective: from the perspective of Germans, whom the Roman historian Tacitus referred to as 'indigenas.'[44]

In the *Japhetic Caucasus*, Marr attempted to lift the veil of the known history of Europe and reveal the original Japhetic layer behind the peoples and nations whose existence is well attested in written records. He attacked what we might term the 'Eurocentrism' of modern-day scholarship, especially in linguistics, by relegating the known Indo-European period of the continent's history to a secondary place with respect to its original Japhetic civilization. Marr plotted a series of migratory routes taken by the Japhetites on their westward movement from the Near East, bringing their linguistic and metallurgical culture with them: Marr's putative Japhetic homeland is the Lake Van region of Anatolia, out of which one branch travelled via Lydia and the Aegean to the Apennine peninsula and Iberia, while another crossed the Caucasus mountains northward before veering west towards the Balkan peninsula and the Alps.[45] The destruction of this once cohesive cultural world of primitive Europe did not erase its innumerable linguistic traces on subsequent languages. Marr's advocacy of a turn inwards to Europe's primitive past, in opposition to the Indo-European linguistic culture given prominence in scholarship, is a similar move to Kossinna's identification of an obscured Nordic origin of

[42] Montelius 1918, p. 70.
[43] Marr [1920], p. 83.
[44] Roy 2014, p. 250.
[45] Marr [1920], pp. 110-111.

civilization which only subsequently diffused down the south. [46] Although he did not acknowledge Kossinna as a source, it is worth noting that Marr echoed the German prehistorian's polemical rejection of the Latin motto *ex Oriente lux* ('light comes from the East') which epitomised the view that Asia was the source of civilization.[47] Both scholars embraced primordialism and rejected diffusionism. For Marr this argument reaches an apogee with an extraordinary claim made about the original status of Japhetic languages and their continued vitality in the form of hybridized layers within Indo-European languages:

> Like the mythical hero Atlas, the Japhetites brush the heavens with their head—their linguistic psychology—and are capable of thinking, speaking and creating in a manner commensurate with every epoch of human cultural history, the present day being no exception; with their torso [tuloviščem]—the morphological structure of their speech—they never lost contact with the prehistoric soil; on the contrary, they remain firmly grounded in it to this day, their feet have sent down roots, and they retain a bond, via an unbroken chain of transformations across a succession of periods, with the state of language that existed when animal speech first became human.[48]

Atlas appears as a totemic representation of the Japhetites, who acquire heroic stature because their languages uniquely maintain a bond that reaches up from prehistory and connects humanity to the anticipated summit of history. The prior global stages of linguistic growth are all retained, which testifies to the longevity of the Japhetic lineage and its ability to adapt to changing historical circumstances. This invocation of Atlas is a boldly polemical move which has as much to do with scholarly convention as Nietzsche's Zarathustra. As the embodiment for organic continuity in cultural life, Marr's Atlas resembles other anthropomorphised figures which can be found in the writings of Blyden ('we shall in this way get back the

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[46] Annegret Plontke-Lünning, 'Strzygowski, Armenien und Eurasien: Materialien aus dem Archiv des Instituts für Kunstgeschichte der Universität Wien', in *Von Biala nach Wien*, ed. by Scholz and Długosz, pp. 207-24 (pp. 221-222).

[47] Marr, [1920], p. 82; Gustaf Kossinna, *Die deutsche Vorgeschichte: eine hervorragend nationale Wissenschaft*, 2nd edn (Würzburg: Kabitzsch, 1914), p. 11, as quoted by Mees 2008, p. 78. In Kossinna's view, the exaltation of the ancient High Cultures of Egypt, Babylonia, and India over and above Northern Europe was, along with the veneration of Rome and the Renaissance in later millennia, a symptom of the belief that the primitive Germans were no more than an 'unverbesserliches, fortschrittsloses Naturvolk' (Kossinna 1914, p. 9).

[48] Marr, [1920], p. 101. Passage also quoted by Slezkine 1996, p. 839.

strength of the race, like the giant of the ancients, who always gained strength, for his conflict with Hercules, whenever he touched his Mother Earth') and Martí ('our feet upon the rosary, our heads white, and our bodies a motley of Indian and criollo we boldly entered the community of nations').[49]

It was in his scholarly temperament, his disregard for the accepted conventions of intellectual debate and the testing of hypotheses against empirical evidence, that Marr especially resembled the more extreme representatives of German outsider scholarship. Marr resembled these oppositional scholars in their predilection for the forceful assertion of novel theories, especially when these were addressed at deficiencies within mainstream methods and attracted acolytes from outside the traditional centres of learning through bullish charisma.[50] He was unwilling or unable to publish a comparative grammar of Japhetic languages and instead produced writings, at a feverish rate, which were either polemical attacks on Indo-European linguistics or abstruse exegetical exercises. The absence of a comparative grammar ensured that authorities in linguistics, such as the comparatist Antoine Meillet, would never engage with Marr's work.[51] Marr repeatedly extended an olive branch to comparative linguistics, but his gestures had the effect of entrenching his position rather than bringing about any reconciliation with the mainstream. At one point he declared that the 'chasm' between Japhetic and Indo-European linguistics could be bridged if Western scholars were prepared 'merely' to study Marr's methods and apply them to learning 'just a single purely Japhetic language—such as Georgian—and a hybrid Japhetic-Indo-European language, i.e., Armenian'.[52] Marr had only limited interest in winning over his critics; it was more productive for him to stress the irreconcilability between Indo-European and Japhetic linguistics because this rendered criticisms of his methods invalid due to being formulated in the terms of a paradigm he rejected.

Marr's intransigence ultimately brought about a rift with his once vociferous advocate in Germany, the philologist and historian Friedrich Braun. A professor of German Philology in St Petersburg, the city of his birth, Braun had a distinctive

[49] Blyden 1887, p. 106; Martí [1891]a, p. 291.
[50] See Marchand 1994, p. 121.
[51] Mikhankova 1949, pp. 324-325.
[52] Nikolaj Marr, 'Čem živet jafetičeskoe jazykoznanie?' [1922a], *Izbrannye raboty*, I (1933), pp. 158-184 (p. 19).

scholarly profile—he researched the Crimean Goths and the linguistic traces they left behind on Crimean Tatar—which aligned him with Marr's interests.[53] Although the two moved in the same scholarly circles in St Petersburg, a crucial meeting occurred in 1920 in Leipzig, the city in which Braun settled after the Russian Revolution, where Marr was able to persuade Braun of the validity of his Japhetic theory and convince him to take part in a bold publishing venture.[54] Designed to launch Marr's ideas into a broader German scholarly sphere and to prove the applicability of Japhetidology to German ethnogenesis, the project was intended to comprise an ambitious number of volumes.[55] In the end, only two programmatic pieces saw the light of day: Braun's introduction to the Japhetic theory as applied to the question of German ethnogenesis and his translation of Marr's *Japhetic Caucasus*. The problem lay in Marr's unwillingness to commit to writing the promised comparative grammar, despite Braun's beseeching.[56] In the end, the two scholars parted company and their joint project floundered in the face of negative criticism from linguists.[57] However, despite Braun's misgivings, the project did in fact succeed insofar as Marr's ideas gained currency among certain scholars, albeit not linguists. The ethnologist and Roman Catholic priest Wilhelm Schmidt looked favourably upon Marr's theory and treated the category of Japhetic languages as a distinct 'Sprachfamilie' within his survey of the world's languages.[58] In his *Weltgeschichte der Steinzeit*, a monumental attempt to prove the influence of prehistory on the present via the continuity of certain geographically defined cultural traditions, the Austrian prehistorian Oswald Menghin cited Marr's *Japhetic Caucasus* favourably as a work illuminating the ethnographic composition of the ancient Near East.[59]

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[53] Lutz-Dieter Behrendt, 'Friedrich Braun und die osteuropäische Geschichte am Institut für Kultur- und Universalgeschichte der Universität Leipzig', *Comparativ*, 1.4 (1991), 30-43 (p. 31); I. V. Tunkina, 'N. Ja. Marr i F. A. Braun: Istorija vzaimootnošenij (1920-1925 gg.)', *Stratum plus*, 4 (2000), 384-391 (pp. 384-385).

[54] Marr and Braun were both involved in the 'Neo-Philological Society', Brandist 2015, p. 209; Tunkina 2000, pp. 385, 387.

[55] Judging from the flyleaves of Braun 1920 and Marr 1923a—volumes I and II, respectively, of 'Japhetitische Studien zur Sprache und Kultur Eurasiens'—the project was to contain: Marr's highly anticipated comparative grammar of Japhetic languages (volume III); German translations of Marr's 1908 Georgian grammatical tables and J. Kipšidze's 1911 grammar of Laz and his 1914 grammar of Mingrelian; a historical grammar of Basque; a study of Etruscan; works on German ethnonyms, the names of metals in Europe and the Near East, among other proposed works of unclear content.

[56] Tunkina 2000, p. 389; Brandist 2015, p. 209.

[57] Tunkina 2000, p. 388.

[58] Wilhelm Schmidt, *Die Sprachfamilien und Sprachenkreise der Erde* (Heidelberg: Winter, 1926), pp. 64-72. Cf. Pugach 2012, pp. 94-5.

[59] Oswald Menghin, *Weltgeschichte der Steinzeit* (Vienna: Schroll, 1931), pp. 538, 541-542. For a discussion of this work and Menghin's conceptualization of 'durable areal traditions of cultural

Menghin was clearly not interested in detailed linguistic analysis; rather, it was the broad sweep of Marr's theory, its success in giving shape to a cultural world which today lives on only in 'kümmerlichen Sprachresten', along with the catchy name 'Japhetic', which appealed to him.[60]

Ultimately Marr came to distance himself from the *Japhetic Caucasus* and the ideas which characterized this phase of his career. In a later article he acknowledged Menghin's use of the Japhetic theory but rebuked the Austrian for adopting a 'racialized perspective' and for basing his argument on a 'thoroughly outmoded' iteration of Marr's thought.[61] This continued resonance of a particular iteration of his work had become a source of embarrassment for Marr. As we saw in Chapter 1, the years following the publication of the *Japhetic Caucasus* saw Marr develop his ideas in ways which made the binary opposition between soil-bound indigenous languages and foreign arrivals seem untenable. The glottogonic theory has revealed that the Indo-European languages, rather than being genetically distinct from the Japhetic languages, were merely an *in situ* typological development out of the preceding Japhetic stage. Languages were thoroughly mixed to an extent that defied the binarism of substrate contacts, and migration no longer played a role in linguistic change. Accordingly, Marr criticized Menghin for overstating the importance of 'so-called Japhetic tribes' (Stämme). Instead, Marr insisted, scholars ought to study the totality of 'Afro-Eurasian languages […] not according to their tribal relations, nor any dubious cultural circles [Kulturkreisen], but according to their socio-economic strata and their strictly sequential stadial developments'.[62]

Even though Marr parted company with Braun, their collaboration, however brief, revealed the degree to which Marr's work resonated with German outsider scholars, especially when it came to their embrace of racial determinism of the kind Marr later repudiated. Braun himself endorsed treating ethnic type as determinant of cultural forms, and therefore it is instructive to consider what he saw in Marr's work.

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development', see Philip L. Kohl and J. A. Pérez Gollán, 'Religion, Politics, and Prehistory: Reassessing the Lingering Legacy of Oswald Menghin', *Current Anthropology*, 43 (2002), 561-586 (pp. 561-562).

[60] Menghin 1931, p. 541. As Menghin put it earlier, 'ich selbst bin kein Linguist, sondern kann nur eben linguistischen Forschungen mit Verständnis folgen' (536).

[61] Nikolai Marr, 'Verba impersonalia, defectiva, substantiva und auxiliaria', *Izvestija Akademii Nauk SSSR*, 8 (1932), 701-730 (p. 710).

[62] Ibid, p. 710.

In his contribution to the project, Braun was unstinting in his praise of Marr's work, which he saw as offering a definitive resolution to a problem which scholars had long identified.[63] The Japhetic theory unified all the disparate pre-Indo-European languages into a single family (UHG, 31). What Marr had achieved for the Caucasus, Near East, and Mediterranean could be applied to Northern Europe: 'das nordeuropäische Urvolk muss mit dem südeuropäischen sprach- und stammverwandt gewesen sein' (UHG, 40). Thus, for Braun, Germanic languages carried a sizeable Japhetic linguistic layer which, in turn, testified to the primordial nature of the Germanic *Urvolk*. Braun criticized archaeologists such as Kossinna for overstating the correlation between prehistoric cultural shifts and the movement of peoples (UHG, 20) and highlighted the shortcomings of anthropology in defining racial types based on slender evidence (UHG, 87). By the same measure, he argued that phonological changes in language were brought about by the mixing of tribes (UHG, 52) and that the proto-Germans were 'somatically' identifiable as Japhetic, embodying a 'sowohl rassig als volkspsychologisch scharf ausgeprägter Typus' with a long-lasting influence on the modern German 'Volkspsyche' (UHG, 89, 91). Braun was more inclined to relate his research to the present-day cultural politics of Germany than Marr. Nonetheless, many of the same ideas were present in Marr's *Japhetic Caucasus*, such as his interpretation of the present-day marginalization of the Basques in Spain as a continuation of the historical fate of Japhetic peoples generally after the Indo-European migration.[64]

Marr's acrimonious split with Braun, and his disowning of the German supporters that he had acquired thanks to the 'Japhetitische Studien' project, would seem to signal a fundamental rupture with the intellectual ferment of turn-of-the-century para-academia in Germany and Austria. In reality, this scholarly world exerted a continued influence on Marr's thought forever after. Outsider scholars were pioneers when it came to recuperating the presence of historically overlooked peoples who were absent from the written record but whose existence could be glimpsed in material artifacts and submerged layers within Indo-European languages. They had introduced a new approach to cultural history which stressed the role of collectives against the backdrop of disciplines which had traditionally

[63] Friedrich Braun, *Die Urbevölkerung Europas und die Herkunft der Germanen* (Berlin, Stuttgart, and Leipzig: Kohlhammer, 1922), p. 49. Henceforth 'UHG'.
[64] Marr [1920], p. 91.

favoured the idea of individual genius. This was the result of several factors: their predilection for demotic and applied arts, their invocation of the inherently collective construct of language as a model for all cultural development, their desire to transcend the boundaries of written history and into a realm of time dominated by dimly discernible tribes and *Urvölker*. Above all, the emphasis on collective agency was a legacy of Herder and the German Romantics of a century prior, who saw the *Volk* as imbued by a unifying Geist which coordinated the action of all its members. These ideas all had enduring appeal for Marr. He was to retain the emphasis on collective agency beyond his substrate phase and well into his glottogonic theory, with its account of language origin. In his substrate phase, Marr suggested that the primitive Japhetic collective continued to exist even after the Indo-European conquest, albeit as a submerged layer in society whose language came to be incorporated as a stratum within the language of the conqueror. [65] In later phases of his career, Marr moved away from treating the primitive collective as enduring across time but referred to the 'collective will' of the labouring masses as a central element driving linguistic processes.[66] The challenge for Marr was how to retain the centrality of the collective without hypostasizing it as an ethnically homogenous entity or a historically timeless Volk with a concomitant *völkisch* culture. This is the subject of the next section which examines a specific case study of Marr's attempts to transcend the limits of German outsider cultural theory while still working within the parameters of the problems that it set.

The next section compares Marr and the Austrian Art Historian Josef Strzygowski.[67] A highly controversial figure, who championed neglected fields of artistic production but remained wedded to a highly racialized account of art history, Strzygowski nonetheless shared many things in common with Marr. Both published

[65] Marr [1920], p. 90.
[66] Nikolaj Marr, 'O proiskhoždenii jazyka' [1926]c, in *Izbrannye raboty*, II (1936), pp. 179-209 (p. 207).
[67] Scholars who have discussed Marr and Strzygowski alongside one another include Christina Maranci, *Medieval Armenian Architecture: Constructions of Race and Nation* (Leuven, Paris, Sterling, VA: Peeters, 2001), pp. 71-74; Claudia Niederl-Garber, *Wie Europa Armenien 'entdeckte': Das Bekanntwerden der Kunstgeschichte Armeniens im Spiegel westlicher Reisender* (Vienna: LIT, 2013), pp. 219-220; Marina Dmitrieva, 'Josef Strzygowski und Russland', in *Von Biala nach Wien*, ed. by Scholz and Długosz, pp. 151-174 (pp. 160-167); Louise McReynolds, 'Nikolai Marr: Reconstructing Ani as the Imperial Ideal', *Ab Imperio*, 1 (2016), 102-124 (pp. 119-122); Ekaterina Pravilova, 'Contested Ruins: Nationalism, Emotions, and Archaeology at Armenian Ani, 1892-1918', *Ab Imperio*, 1 (2016), 69-101 (pp. 91-92).

work on Armenian architecture, which allows for a direct comparison, and both foregrounded the role of collective and non-elite actors in the creation of artworks. However, they differed in important respects. Strzygowski viewed artworks and buildings as the product of a singular artistic vision which, in turn, could be related to a particular *völkisch* genius. He was attentive to 'indigenous' (einheimisch) artistic practice which he saw as more authentic than the official aesthetic doctrines of empires which were imposed from above.[68] Marr likewise placed great emphasis on local artistic traditions, not least in his extensive archaeological investigations of medieval Armenian architectural remains, which he set in opposition to big geopolitical developments. Yet unlike Strzygowski, Marr did not treat the local milieu as ethnically homogeneous: continuity of place did not imply continuity of people. Additionally, Marr did not treat the artifacts he uncovered as the product of a single creative vision, but rather as composite structure reconciling multiple viewpoints and, in the case of buildings, being susceptible to modification and reinvention over time, with no iteration being more or less authentic than any other. In order to offer a credible alternative to Strzygowski, Marr needed to achieve two things: firstly, to redefine the collective creative process in a manner which did not construe it as the expression of ethnic identity and, secondly, to find an approach to studying works of art which treated them as the cumulative result of separate creative influences rather than the product of a single creative act which, as Strzygowski saw it, endowed the artwork with its essence even before it assumed material form. How successfully Marr managed this almost impossible task is the subject of the sections that follow; it will indicate how far he was able, like Firmin, to define meaningful cultural particulars without treating them as the consequence of biological identity.

## 3.3 Situating Armenian Architecture: Marr and Strzygowski

Judged according to volume and complexity of their written output, combativeness of temperament, and disdain towards the humanist tradition of European scholarship,

[68] Christina Maranci, 'Basilicas and Black Holes: The Legacy of Josef Strzygowski and the Case of Armenian Architecture', *Acta historiae atrium*, 47 (2006), 313-320 (p. 314); Marchand 2015, p. 273.

Marr had his match in the art historian Josef Strzygowski. Much like Marr, whose senior he was by two years, Strzygowski was born into a provincial backwater at the edge of empire: the city of Biala in the province of Austrian Silesia. The son of a textile manufacturer and exporter of Fez hats, Strzygowski belonged, his Slavic family name notwithstanding, to the urbanized German minority of a majority Polish region.[69] The culturally diverse surroundings in which he grew up may have been the germ for his scholarly sensitivity to different cultural traditions; the fact that he was born into a class whose waning economic pre-eminence led many of its members to embrace exclusionary political ideologies, such as Pan-Germanism and anti-Catholicism, may have shaped his tendency as a scholar to see ethnic difference as a catalyst for conflict historically.[70] Eventually becoming professor of Art History in Vienna, where he occupied a specially created chair that existed concurrently with a traditionally humanist professorship in the subject, Strzygowski's career straddled numerous contexts which included the Habsburg empire, with its then-liberal approach to promoting cultural autonomy among national minorities, and Berlin, capital of the Kaiserreich and the city of Strzygowski's student years, whose professors opened his eyes to Byzantine and Slavic art history and whose royal museums offered him the financial means, over many years, to acquire objects from far and wide.[71]

Strzygowski's principal scholarly aim was to uncover the origin of Christian art, which was to be found not in Greece or Rome but in the Near East.[72] Western European scholars had relegated 'Oriental' art to the periphery and treated it as derivative of Roman and Hellenic genius.[73] Over the course of tempestuous years of public controversy, while sparring with the scholarly establishment and garnering popular adulation, Strzygowski pursued a wide array of interests in provinces of art history unfamiliar to the Western European imaginary. He distinguished himself, in his writings and his acquisition of artifacts, by his ability to curate recondite objects

[69] Suzanne Marchand, 'The View from the Land: Austrian Art Historians and the Interpretation of Croatian Art', in *Dalmatia and the Mediterranean: Portable Archaeology and the Poetics of Influence*, ed. by Alina Payne (Leiden and Boston: Brill, 2014), 21-58, (p. 37).
[70] Maranci 2001, pp. 167-170; cf. also Marchand 1994, pp. 118-9 for a comparison of Strzygowski's anti-classicism with the Austrian nationalist anti-Catholic 'Los von Rom' movement.
[71] Niederl-Garber 2013, pp. 216-217; Marchand 2015, pp. 262-265, 271.
[72] Ulrich Bock, *Die armenische Baukunst: Geschichte und Problematik ihrer Erforschung* (Cologne: Abteilung Architektur des Kunsthistorischen Instituts der Universität zu Köln, 1983), p. 41.
[73] Cf. Marchand 1994, p. 119.

and intuit their formal relationships. The many branches of material culture which Strzygowski treated included Italo-Byzantine painting, Armenian ecclesiastical architecture, Coptic sculpture, Sassanian reliefs, European folk art, Scythian goldsmith work, and the wooden church building of Finland.[74] Strzygowski combined his affinity for material objects with a dismissiveness towards written sources, which he considered too second-hand and not reflective of the 'wurzelechten Kern der den Ausschlag gebenden Unterschicht'.[75] Strzygowski's hostility towards the culture of elites resonates strongly with Marr's sense that the veneration of national literatures had, in the modern era, become a means for dominant classes to 'cement their system of production and entrench their way of life'.[76] By the same measure, Strzygowski's preference for the popular substratum of society, conceived as an organic entity, was bound up with a *völkisch* nationalism that has made his scholarly legacy toxic despite his pioneering work in so many fields of art history. Marr too swam in these waters.

In their own separate ways, Marr and Strzygowski both sought to decentre the geography of knowledge which sustained the myth of Western European historical pre-eminence. The central thesis of Strzygowski's first polemical work, with its pugnacious title *Orient oder Rom?*, was that Christian art did not emerge solely out of Roman imperial art—i.e. from the period after Emperor Constantine's conversion—but from multiple sources across the Near East.[77] In the fourth, fifth and sixth centuries so crucial to the emergence of Christian art, Rome did not project its aesthetic doctrine outwards onto the world, as others had argued, but instead received artistic impetus from the indigenous, autochthonous ('bodenständig') practices of Egypt, Syria, Asia Minor, and Greece.[78] In place of the prevailing unilinear model of diffusion, Strzygowski argued that Rome was one artistic 'centre' among many others.[79] Later on he described the diffusion of artistic forms across a series of organically interconnected traditions which occupied a geographic realm

[74] Bock 1983, p. 42; Marchand 1994, pp. 121, 125; Marchand 2014, p. 38; Dmitrieva 2015, p. 156; for a partial overview of his publications see Alfred Karasek-Langer, *Verzeichnis der Schriften von Josef Strzygowski* (Klagenfurt: Kollitsch, 1933).
[75] Josef Strzygowski, 'Die Stellung des Islams zum geistigen Aufbau Europas', *Acta Academiae Aboensis. Humaniora*, 3.3 (1922), 3-32 (p. 23); referred to in Marchand 1994, p. 123.
[76] Marr 1925b, p. 1013.
[77] Marchand 2015, p. 275.
[78] Josef Strzygowski, *Orient oder Rom: Beiträge zur Geschichte der spätantiken und frühzeitlichen Kunst* (Leipzig: Hindrichs, 1901), p. 7; also referenced in Marchand 2015, p. 273.
[79] Strzygowski 1901, p. 8.

extending from Iran into Northern and Western Europe. Strzygowski's conception of this diffuse web of creative exchange began to assume that shape of an 'Aryan axis of architecture' in opposition to the 'Mediterranean' hegemonic power of Rome which sought to impose hierarchical uniformity.[80] Marr's early research on Eastern Christianity also emphasized the importance of non-hierarchical exchanges even during the ascendancy of great political powers. He denied that the spread of Christianity in the Caucasus, and the various theological controversies which ensued, stemmed solely from the projection of Byzantine imperial power. Instead, Christianity in the region was shaped by the local 'ferment' of ideas, and the Caucasus itself was not an outpost of Byzantine power but rather the northernmost 'link' in a chain of early Christian communities which extended through the Holy Land all the way to Sinai.[81] As Marr's attention came to be drawn more to his Japhetic Theory, he continued to be preoccupied with the concept of cultural diffusion occurring through contiguous localities rather than being dictated and imposed by imperial powers. This is evident in his treatment of the ethnolinguistic map of prehistoric Europe, where he argued that 'to all appearances the entire Mediterranean, until the rise of the Greeks and Romans, was settled by peoples of the Japhetic tribe.'[82] Marr portrayed Japhetic Europe as a decentred expanse of tribes whose unity was only disrupted by the arrival of the Indo-Europeans. If his *Japhetic Caucasus* delved into the Bronze Age in order to relativize the historical importance of Greece and Rome, this could be thought of as complementing Strzygowski's preoccupation with the waning of Roman power in Late Antiquity. These efforts gained Strzygowski the nickname 'the Attila of Art History', an apt moniker given his scholarly predilections and personal belligerence.[83]

Where the two scholars crossed paths, both literally and metaphorically, was in the study of Armenia. Over the course of many years Marr excavated the deserted city of Ani, the legendary medieval capital of the Bagratid Armenian kingdom, famed for its thousand and one churches. 'Rediscovered' in the nineteenth century, the city's mournful isolation, its impressive walls, and the intricacy of its stonework,

[80] Maranci 2006, p. 314.
[81] Marr [1912], pp. 71-2.
[82] Marr 1922b, p. 19.
[83] Udo Kultermann, *Geschichte der Kunstgeschichte: Der Weg einer Wissenschaft* (Frankfurt a. M., Berlin, Vienna: Ullstein, 1981), p. 294; quoted in Marchand 1994, p. 119.

fashioned from locally quarried reddish volcanic tufa, made it an enticing destination for travellers (Figure 3).[84] At the conclusion of the Russo-Turkish wars in 1878, Ani passed into the Russian Empire as part of the Kars region. Despite lacking archaeological experience, Marr was dispatched to Ani by the Russian Imperial Archaeological Commission on the strength of his linguistic expertise alone.[85] He directed excavations of the site from 1892 to 1917 which uncovered dwellings both grand and humble, places of worship, civic buildings, and thousands of artifacts.[86] Marr established a museum in Ani, which was important both because it ensured that artifacts remained in situ, but also because it generated much-needed revenue through the sale of postcards and trinkets.[87] However, his ambitious projects in Ani were overtaken by geopolitical events at the close of the First World War. In 1918 Ottoman forces advanced on the city, and belated efforts to evacuate artifacts merely resulted in their loss.[88] Marr was never able to return to the site, although his efforts to excavate and document the city remain the most expansive ever undertaken.[89]

Figure 3: 'Checkerboard Gate' and portion of city walls (cf. Der Manuelian 2001, p. 6) as depicted in a postcard from the Ani Museum sent by a visitor in 1912.

[84] Lucy Der Manuelian, 'Ani: The Fabled Capital of Armenia', in *Ani: World Architectural Heritage of a Medieval Armenian Capital*, ed. by S. Peter Cowe (Leuven and Sterling, VA: Peeters, 2001), pp. 1-11 (p. 6).
[85] McReynolds 2016, pp. 106-107.
[86] Der Manuelian 2001, pp. 7-8.
[87] Pravilova 2016, pp. 84-5, 99.
[88] Pravilova 2016, pp. 98-9.
[89] Many of Marr's writings on Ani were collated in a volume published shortly after his death and translated into French almost seventy years later. Nikolaj Marr, *Ani: Rêve d'Arménie*, trans. by Aïda Tcharkhtchian (Paris: Anagramme, 2001).

Armenia acquired great significance for Strzygowski because it was there that he felt he had reached 'solid ground' in his quest for the non-Roman anchor of Christian art.[90] Strzygowski's extensive travels to places off the beaten track took him, in the 1880s and 1890s, to Egypt, Greece (including the monastic communities of Mount Athos, which Marr likewise visited in 1898), Anatolia, the Caucasus, Russia, and once again to Armenia in 1913, where he visited Ani for the first time.[91] Through his Russian contacts, Strzygowski was acquainted with the archaeologist and art historian Nikodim Kondakov, a scholar who made similar points to Marr by arguing that the Caucasus formed part of broad Eurasian cultural continuum binding Moscow to Byzantium and the East.[92] Despite their overlapping interests and travel itineraries, Marr and Strzygowski do not appear to have engaged in any sustained intellectual exchange (they met once in St Petersburg in 1914).[93] Of greater significance is their shared reliance on the Armenian architect Toros Toramanian: one of the members of the Ani archaeological team, Toramanian specialized in interpreting the remains of buildings to produce sketches and plans of how the buildings originally looked, some of which illustrated Marr's reports, with many more furnishing Strzygowski's monumental *Baukunst der Armenier in Europa* (1918).[94] Indeed, sketches and photographs were a key element of Strzygowski's magnum opus as they substantiated his claims for typological affinities between Armenian buildings and their counterparts elsewhere in Europe and the Near East. A central feature of Armenian architecture in Strzygowski's account was the dome, a form with indigenous pagan roots that carried on into Christian architecture where it was brilliantly deployed in such structures as Zvartnots Cathedral and the Church of St Gregory in Ani—monumental ruins given vivid form by Toramanian's reconstructions.[95] According to Strzygowski's account, Armenian architects adopted the Persian technical innovation of building a circular or octagonal dome on a square base, perfected its form and employed it in the building of churches which, owing to the country's early conversion to Christianity, arrived on the scene at a pivotal art

[90] To quote Strzygowski himself, 'In Armenien zum ersten Male fühle ich festen Boden unter den Füssen und nun erst konnte ich verweilen.' *Die Baukunst der Armenier und Europa,* 2 vols (Vienna: Anton Schroll, 1918), II, p. 87; also quoted by Bock (1983, p. 43) and Maranci (2001, p. 159).
[91] Thomas 1957, p. 3; Bock 1983, p. 42; Marchand 1994, p. 117; Pravilova 2016, p. 92.
[92] Marchand 2015, p. 267; McReynolds 2016, pp. 104, 120.
[93] Pravilova 2016, p. 92.
[94] Pravilova 2016, p. 92. Strzygowski was reportedly able to obtain the use of Toramanian's sketches by offering him better terms of publication than Marr (Maranci 2001, p. 47, f. 13).
[95] Cf. Maranci 2001, pp. 47-69.

historical moment.[96] The 'diffusion' of this form of church architecture to Western Europe, present today in Aachen Cathedral and the Basilica of San Vitale in Ravenna, was directly attributable to Armenian architectural brilliance.[97] His 1918 *Armenien* work confirmed what he had long suspected: that these Western European buildings were not outliers but staging points indicating the path 'den diese vielumstrittene Bauform gegangen ist', which is to say, the path back to northern Syria, Asia Minor and Armenia.[98] For Strzygowski, these axes of artistic exchange between Western Europe and the Near East were evidence of an 'alte hellenistisch-orientalische Unterlage der abendländischen Kunst' which had existed before Rome gained its hegemonic status and blotted out local traditions in the name of uniformity.[99] The domical church, Armenia's gift to Christian architecture, was true to the religion's oriental and pagan roots, and stood in diametrical opposition to the Roman basilica, a form which embodied hierarchical power and subordination by forcing the gaze of the congregation towards a single point in the apse.[100] In the centuries that followed Rome's assertion of dominance, two cultures and their respective artistic traditions became locked in battle: the Irano-Armeno-Anatolian 'Aryan' peoples and the Greco-Roman powers of the Mediterranean.[101]

Marr's work in Ani led him to different conclusions about the ethno-national affiliation of art and the demographic factors which cause changes in building style as compared to Strzygowski. Over the course of his investigations, Marr came to understand the city as an evolving organism in which opposing political and aesthetic directions were reconciled, a point of view reflected in his reports and in his presentation of the materials excavated. Ani experienced periods of political and economic growth which were punctuated by devastating conquests and massacres before entering into terminal decline in the fourteenth century: it was made into the capital of Bagratid Armenia in 961, was conquered by the Byzantines in 1045, and in the centuries that followed switched hands between Seljuk, Kurdish, Georgian, and

[96] Plontke-Lünning, 2015, pp. 209-10.
[97] Bock 1983, p. 46.
[98] Josef Strzygowski, *Kleinasien: ein Neuland der Kunstgeschichte* (Leipzig: Hinrich, 1903), p. 102.
[99] Josef Strzygowski, *Der Dom zu Aachen und seine Entstellung: ein kunstwissenschaftlicher Protest* (Leipzig: Hinrich, 1904), p. 19.
[100] Maranci 2006, p. 314.
[101] Dmitrieva 2015, p. 159.

Mongol rulers.[102] Marr stressed the importance of allocating equal space to all the periods of Ani's history rather than focusing solely on the brief period of Bagratid rule, a position which ran counter to the Armenian nationalist interpretation of the city.[103] Marr pointed out that Ani's most notable intact feature, its extensive and highly ornamented walls, were continuously embellished by subsequent rulers, and that the city's Islamic architecture showed just as much creative merit as its older Christian buildings.[104] Early discoveries from the city's remains, such as the close proximity of churches and mosques, suggested a harmonious coexistence of religions which was quite at odds with the textual tradition of Ani as a Christian Armenian city ransacked by Muslim 'hordes'.[105] Individual works of art unearthed in Ani also testified to the city's conciliatory approach to ethnic and confessional difference. Items especially prized by Marr included a freestanding statue of King Gagik in which the Christian Armenian king is depicted wearing a turban on his head—which Marr interpreted as an Islamic cultural borrowing pointing to the Bagratid dynasty's Sassanian ties—and a cruciform pendant around his neck, a sign of Byzantine influence.[106] Multiple conflicting religious and confessional doctrines seemed to converge on Ani without leading to a conflict. As early as 1907 Marr cited the church of Saint Gregory in Ani, then undergoing excavation, as evidence disproving Strzygowski's assumption of an inherent Armenian 'national' hostility to the Byzantine Chalcedonian Creed and its aesthetic forms.[107] As the excavations continued, Marr found ever more evidence proving the fluidity of ethnic, linguistic, and confessional boundaries within Ani and the inapplicability of 'modern' conceptions of nationality.[108]

Marr was able to take the conclusions he drew about Ani based on its archaeological remains and apply them to other contexts. The city's artistic life functioned as an organism in which disparate influences entered into complex

[102] Ṫ. X. Hakobyan, 'Ani: An Odyssey through the Ages', in *Ani: World Architectural Heritage of a Medieval Armenian Capital*, ed. by Cowe, pp. 13-21 (pp. 15-19); Nikolaj Marr, 'Ani, la ville arménienne en ruines, d'après les fouilles de 1892-1893 et de 1904-1917', *Revue des études arméniennes* 1 (1921), 395-410 (p. 399).
[103] Marr 1921, p. 398; cf. McReynolds 2016, pp. 109-110.
[104] Marr 1921, pp. 398, 401.
[105] Pravilova 2016, pp. 74-75.
[106] Marr 2001, p. 121; McReynolds 2016, pp. 111-112.
[107] Nikolaj Marr, *O raskopkakh i rabotakh v Ani letom 1906 goda. Predvaritel'nyj otčet* (St Petersburg: Tipografija Imperatorskoj Akademii Nauk, 1907), pp. 2-3.
[108] Marr 1921, p. 401.

interrelations with one another in a locally specific manner. Marr evoked this concept of cultural interrelations when arguing for the need to study the history of Armenia and Georgia comparatively and in a regional context rather than individually, as nationalists had tended to do:

> the true nature of any given people from the Caucasus is not dictated by its own assessment of itself as a nation [ne ot ego nacional'noj samoocenki], but by the place it occupies in a specific holistic cultural grouping which is formed by the interrelation of various cultural elements.[109]

Thus, the individual 'people' by itself' does not embody a positive value but derives meaning relationally. Marr wrote those lines shortly before embarking upon another season of excavations; a decade later he elaborated on these themes in an essay, published in a French journal of Armenian history, in which he synthesized his conclusions on Ani having now been prevented from returning to the site due to the recent political developments. Here he expressed his sense of how the city represented a complex whole comprising multiple types of buildings and architectural styles amounting to a 'véritable musée d'architecture' (AVA, 400). The cultural layers deposited in the city by its successive inhabitants offer a complex stratigraphy in which individual influences cannot be easily detached from the whole: the strata 'sont non seulement juxtaposées, mais aussi superposées les unes aux autres ou même enchevêtrées les unes avec les autres d'une manière compliquée' (AVA, 398). This implies a difficulty in identifying clean breaks between different cultural eras in the city's history. Indeed, where Marr does identify the influence of a specifically named culture on the city, such as the Seljuks who shaped Ani's Islamic architecture, he argues that the newly imported stylistic forms were adapted according to 'l'art décoratif local d'Ani et ses procédés techniques, en particulier le choix de matériaux' (AVA, 401). Adaptation and syncretism rather than faithfulness to any one aesthetic vision thus characterize the city's artistic practice. Marr contrasts modern-day assumptions about the fixity of ethnic and confessional identity with the pragmatism of the city's inhabitants. Despite the city's periodic violent conquests, he imagines its inhabitants to have been 'oublieux des dévastations subies' (AVA, 399), supremely pragmatic in rebuilding the damage.

[109] Marr 1912, p. 70.

They constantly renovate their churches according to the latest tastes.[110] As he puts it, 'les constructeurs ou restaurateurs d'Ani n'étaient pas des antiquaires' (AVA, 402). The city's evolving local style stems from the ceaseless 'souffle créatif' emanating from the 'milieu artistique' (AVA, 402). Its syncretic and continually evolving local style testifies to the seemingly miraculous ingenuity of its inhabitants whose presence Marr senses in the stone and dust of the archaeological site. This centrality accorded to locality, combined with a vitalist if not to say mystical evocation of popular creative genius, characterise Marr's understanding of cultural diffusion and likely led to his emphasis on in situ linguistic developments within the glottogonic process.

Moreover, the conclusions Marr drew from his work in Ani ran counter to Strzygowski not merely in the domain of Armenian architectural history but in the matter of collective identity in art. Objects in Ani seemed to defy easy attribution to specific ethnic, confessional, or political groups. Strzygowski, by contrast, made direct correlations between artistic traits and ethnic, or indeed racial, groupings. This is visible in his account of Armenia's status as the location in which Eastern domical forms were synthesized and then transmitted onwards to the West:

> Die alte asiatisch-arische Kultur blieb in Armenien Sieger und daraus erklärt sich, dass der Kuppelbau, nicht die Basilika, dort herrschend werden konnte und dann von Armenien aus Europa eroberte.[111]

This passage portrays the meeting of cultures in militaristic zero-sum terms, in which developments within architecture occur in the manner of clashing armies or the struggles between biologically essentialized ethnicities (in the manner of Herder).[112] It has been claimed that Strzygowski was above all a formalist, as evidenced by his exhaustive descriptions and typologies of artifacts based on formal and stylistic traits, and that racial arguments were merely a secondary concern, albeit one which became more prominent in his later work.[113] This argument is hard to maintain because, when describing the diffusion of artistic forms through space, he seems

[110] 'A Ani, pas une église n'a été laissée intacte par cette tendance à moderniser, excepté les temples, qui, tombés en ruines, gisaient ensevelis sous la terre. On restaurait les anciens bâtiments, on les remaniait, on les reconstruisait d'après les goûts modernes.' Marr 1921, p. 402.
[111] Strzygowski 1918, I, p. V; quoted by Bock (1983, p. 47).
[112] On Herder's biological concept of ethnicity and culture, see Ward-Perkins 2005, p. 5.
[113] Marchand 2015, p. 276.

constantly to identify specific ethnic groups as being responsible for their transmission. He offered multiple candidates as the group responsible for bringing Armenian architectural forms to Western Europe. These included the Goths (who at one point in their history inhabited Cappadocia, a region adjacent to Armenia), the Slavs, or perhaps the Armenians themselves, whether migrating in groups or singly, in the form of individual master-builders.[114] Regardless of the specifics, Strzygowski seems to have assumed that the architectural forms he held in esteem could only have been adopted and transmitted by peoples whose ethnic composition made them culturally sympathetic to the original Asiatic-Aryan cultural core.[115] The creative contributions made by peoples outside of the favoured 'Kulturkreise' were not held in such esteem by Strzygowski.[116] In Strzygowski's view, some important Georgian buildings shared similarities with contemporary Armenian buildings, but despite this he saw Georgian architects as inferior and, furthermore, non-Aryan imitators of Armenian genius.[117] External appearances could be copied, but what mattered to Strzygowski was establishing whether buildings in disparate parts of the world were shaped by the same original artistic vision.[118] The original vision could only be transmitted intact between peoples belonging to the same ethno-cultural grouping.

Even if Strzygowski did not always explicitly correlate artistic forms with racial types, his method of art historical analysis predisposed him to present artworks as the creation of an organically holistic community. Strzygowski believed that artworks (or at least the authentic demotic ones he valued) were the result of collective creative activity. He also thought that artworks were shaped by a unified intentional will. It therefore follows from these two propositions that he saw the collective as operating in a unified and self-consistent manner. Having identified the underlying intention behind a work of art, it was a short step to attributing both artwork and intention to a specific ethnic or racial group. Strzygowski thought that

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[114] Annegret Plontke-Lüning, *Frühchristliche Architektur in Kaukasien: Die Entwicklung des christlichen Sakralbaus in Lazika, Iberien, Armenien, Albanien und den Grenzregionen vom 4. bis zum 7. Jh.* (Vienna: Verlag der Österreichichen Akademie der Wissenschaften, 2007), p. 66; Niederl-Garber 2013, pp. 229-33.
[115] As commentators have put it, Strzygowski traced the diffusion of forms across related 'Kulturkreise' (Niederl-Garber 2013, p. 229) in what amounted to an 'Aryan axis of architecture' (Maranci 2006, p. 314).
[116] Although Strzygowski did not use the term 'Kulturkreis' himself, scholars have used it convincingly to characterize his theory of contiguous cultural zones. Cf. Niederl-Garber 2013, p.230.
[117] Maranci 2001, p. 162.
[118] Cf. Plontke-Lüning 2007, p. 66.

art historians should approach artworks with an eye to recuperating the artistic vision of which they were the expression. He formulated a method, which he termed *Wesensforschung*, which the scholar was to follow in order to identify the 'essence' (Wesen) of the artwork under investigation. The method comprised a deliberate sequence of steps in which the scholar first had to ascertain the artwork's fundamental formal and material traits, along with its underlying artistic intention, before assigning its place in a taxonomy of formal types, and only latterly bringing historical and philological evidence to bear.[119] The central importance Strzygowski accorded to the unity of artistic vision ruled out any interest in the kind of cumulative processes Marr identified in Ani, in which objects were shown to be shaped by multiple artistic intentions over the course of time. Strzygowski understood the task of determining the artwork's *Wesen* to be a preliminary step to discerning the unifying creative intention which lay behind it. His conception of creative intentionality was shaped by the scholarly context of Viennese Art History. Alois Riegl, a scholar who pioneered the study of Late Antiquity, considered works of art to be 'das Resultat eines bestimmten und zweckbewussten Kunstwollens'—a 'creative will' which he argued was characteristic of a culture as a whole and which operated in a 'supra-individualistic' manner that transcended the individual will of the artist.[120] Strzygowski made a targeted modification of Riegl's concept by reworking the latter's voluntaristic ideal of artistic creation (his 'will to art') into a deterministic 'Kunstmüssen' or creative 'drive' which was rooted in the collective unconscious of the non-elite lower strata of the Volk.[121] In Strzygowski's analysis of individual buildings we can see his preference for minimizing the role of the individual architect to merely channelling the aesthetic ideals of the collective. This is visible in his analysis of the Church of Saint Hripsime, a seemingly unique example of a domed tetraconch, but which Strzygowski argued was merely a surviving instance of a once widespread formal type (Gattung):

> Diese Hripsime ist keine Neuschöpfung eines erfinderischen Kopfes, sondern, wie die Vorführung ihrer Gattung ganz deutlich machte, ein durch

[119] Bock 1983, pp. 38-39.
[120] Alois Riegl, *Die spätrömische Kunst-Industrie nach den Funden in Österreich-Ungarn* (Vienna: Staatsdruckerei, 1901), p. 5, as quoted by Bock 1983, p. 40. Cf. also Kultermann 1981, p. 289. For Riegl's reappraisal, or indeed invention of late antique art, see Elsner, 2020, p. 113.
[121] Bock 1983, p. 40.

> Jahrhunderte gewordener Typus, dessen Möglichkeit durch die von vornherein leitende Idee der Kuppel bedingt ist.[122]

Strzygowski did not consider the Church of Saint Hripsime to be *exceptional*—the result of an individual architect's 'whim'—but *typical* of a formal type which, in turn, presupposed a communally-held aesthetic 'idea' of the dome. Architectural success relied on a combination of aesthetic ideals and practical know-how which, in Strzygowski's view, did not exist in all communities and, moreover, strongly correlated with ethnic identity.[123]

Marr and Strzygowski resembled one another in their dedication to overlooked cultures, whose marginalization they both attributed to the rise of dominant powers, and in their desire to intuit the presence of collective creative genius in fragmentary remains of material culture. A recognizable current of German Romanticism informed both scholars. However, they also differed sharply in their aesthetic theories. Marr's reading of Ani seemed to deny the central tenets of Strzygowski's theory; namely, the latter's emphasis on the unity of aesthetic vision and his conception of the collective as a cohesive entity coinciding with ethnic lines. In Ani, Marr discovered buildings and artifacts of undeniable artistry which were shaped by different groups of people following separate aesthetic agendas over time. Marr valued syncretism over aesthetic purity. He understood the city's style as organically evolving via a continuous process of borrowing and adaptation. Continuity of artistic development, moreover, occurred despite the changes in the city's rulers and the violent disruptions to the demographic fabric. Marr did not depict Ani's premodern history as a violence-free idyll. In a particularly visceral passage, he describes how the city's inhabitants had to rebuild after the devastation wrought by military conquest:

> Après que l'on eut saccagé la ville et massacré sa population, dans sa partie qui opposait la résistance acharnée, au cas des grandes dévastations on ne déblayait pas le terrain quand la vie recommençait, on s'installait sur les ruines et l'amoncellement des fragments et parfois aussi des cadavres

[122] Strzygowski 1918, II, p. 680. See also ibid, I, p. 82.
[123] Elsewhere in the *Baukunst*, Strzygowski attributes the Georgians' failure to imitate domed structures to their inability to work out 'wie sie diese neue Idee mit ihren bisherigen baulichen Erfahrungen vereinigen sollten.' 1918, II, p. 758.

> disséminés. On ne se donnait la peine que d'aplanir les monceaux. Et cela s'est répété maintes fois. (AVA, 399)

Marr presents Ani as supremely adaptable to change, as evidenced by the pragmatism, bordering on indifference, of the populace in reinstating normality in the aftermath of destruction, and in the suppleness of the city's artistic traditions in adjusting to new political and confessional demands. This was far removed from Strzygowski's zero-sum understanding of aesthetic clashes, in which only one side of a conflict could win out and impose their ideals on the rest. Like Strzygowski, Marr viewed the popular substrata of society as the repository of artistic energy. The two thinkers likewise both presented aesthetic forms as the product of a long gestation period next to which the intentions of the individual artists are of lesser importance. However, whereas Strzygowski viewed continuity of ethnic identity as a requirement for organic aesthetic development, for Marr it was the material parameters of *place* that mattered most. Cities such as Ani accommodate shifts in confession, national identity, and ethnic composition, all the while providing the conditions for a unique artistic style to emerge. Marr suggested that the community itself was a product of place. It was not constituted on the back of its ethnic composition, which was liable to undergo dramatic shifts over time. Thus, in exploring Ani, Marr adopted positions which have analogues in Firmin's debate with the ideology of *latinidad*. Marr's dissociation of the idea of community from any notion of constancy in its ethnic composition was a repudiation of the claim that societies form through the consolidation and coordination of their living members—an idea advanced by Hostos. Marr's Ani was, for most of its history, half-dead, and its artistic development owed as much to non-human factors of place as to artistic volition. Despite this, the city's culture was a vibrant and unique synthesis of multiple elements. Ani's syncretic culture was not invoked in support of a claim, such as that made by Martí, that a common culture reflects the transcendence of racial different: as Marr argued, Ani's population was ethnically and linguistically plural.[124] Firmin attributed greater significance to the continuity of ethno-racial identity through time, as in his assertion that Haitians are 'sociologiquement […] Afro-latins' (LST, 91). Nonetheless, the *Lettres de Saint-Thomas* display Firmin's dissociation of this unfolding of ethnicity from developments in language. This is an

[124] Cf. Hatfield 2015, p. 24.

argument pursued by Marr in the field of art history as well as language. Because he did not think that the existence of a characteristic style implied a unified creative intention, Marr removed a key element of Strzygowski's identification of artistic trends with specific ethnic groups. We will now examine this topic with reference to a particularly characteristic and complex architectural form.

## 3.4 Diffusion versus Parallel Emergence: The Question of the Dome

Marr disrupted Strzygowski's equation of complex architectural forms with unified artistic vision. If for Strzygowski, complexity implied intentionality, Marr saw it as an emergent phenomenon in the philosophical sense: that is to say, he thought that complex forms could come about (emerge) through an unforeseen confluence of simpler pre-existing structures and processes.[125] This was true also of his global glottogonic theory, in which universal linguistic process grew out of the convergence of separate embryonic proto-linguistic operations which themselves arose in multiple separate parts of the world. In this section we will examine Marr's theory of the emergence of a complex architectural structure: the domed tetraconch. A church built according to this layout contains a central quatrefoil composed of four piers which are joined to one another by semi-circular rows of columns (see Figure 5, below); above all of this sits a central dome whose weight is transferred onto the piers.[126] Strzygowski singled out this form as characteristically Armenian. Marr, by

[125] 'Emergence' is a concept often associated with the twentieth-century German philosopher Nicolai Hartmann. He described 'emergence' in terms of sets of laws governing the growth of all physical and biological structures in the universe. Specifically, 'emergence' occurs when, in the cumulative growth of lower- to higher-order complexity, new traits arise in the higher-order structure which could not be predicted from the lower-order structure. Roberto Poli, 'Hartmann's Theory of Categories: Introductory Remarks', in *The Philosophy of Nicolai Hartmann*, ed by Roberto Poli, Carlo Scognamiglio, Frederic Tremblay (Berlin and Boston: De Gruyter, 2011) pp. 1-32 (p. 27). To apply it to Marr may risk anachronism. However, it could also be argued that the idea of 'emergence' existed in other forms earlier, and that Hartmann was merely a persuasive articulator of these ideas. A connection could be drawn to Enlightenment debates in the life sciences: whereas 'Buffon viewed the organism as an association of parts whose movements could be interpreted according to the Newtonian mechanical laws' in time 'theories of organic interdependence now replaced those of free association' and, with the advent of Biology, 'a science devoted exclusively to the study of life-processes, scientists turned their attention away from the fixed details of external form to focus on the principles of internal organisation and the laws that governed historical development.' Shuttleworth 1984, pp. 2-3.

[126] Cf. Kleinbauer's description of Zvartnots: 'in layout the church was an aisled tetraconch: four massive, W-shaped piers connected by three curved columnar exedrae and (to the east) a solid

contrast, theorized it as emerging in multiple separate locations, not in accordance with a singular artistic 'vision' but via a sequence of incremental developments. Examples of this type of building include St Hripsime Church, Zvartnots Cathedral, and Saint Gregory's Church in Ani, all of which received extensive attention by Strzygowski in his *Baukunst*. For Strzygowski the diffusion of this 'Bauform' tracked the influence of Armenian architectural genius. Because Marr could account for the emergence of this form outside Armenia and as the result of combinatory factors rather than singular artistic intention, he was—at least in principle—able to avoid treating it as the expression of ethnic identity as manifest in art. Marr was ambitious in attempting to redefine the nature of collective artistic production, even if he did not completely succeed in breaking with the past.

The context for this discussion comes from an article of 1923 in which Marr discusses the fate of the Marneion, a temple of the celestial god Marnas, which existed in Gaza until its destruction in 402 A.D. as part of a Christianisation campaign.[127] It was an early domed structure, attested only in one written eyewitness source, which received only passing mention by Strzygowski. Marr accorded great importance to the building and offered an ingenious, although very speculative account of how this simple domed structure survived its apparent destruction by spontaneously being transformed into a domed tetraconch.

Grasping Marr's thesis requires that we first cover some contextual ground. Marr originally wrote the work as a conference paper which was delivered on his behalf at the Congrès international des sciences historiques in Brussels, before publishing it in French in his journal of Japhetic Studies.[128] Marr avoided the polemical tone he had adopted in earlier publications aimed at a Western European

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continuous wall (supporting an order of columns?) marked off an inner quatrefoil or tetraconch that was circled by spacious ambulatories enclosed by thirty-two-sided walls ornamented by lush carvings'. W. Eugene Kleinbauer, 'Zvart'nots and the Origins of Christian Architecture in Armenia', *The Art Bulletin*, 54.3 (1972), 245-262 (p. 245). The characterization of Zvartnots as an *aisled* tetraconch refers to the fact that it had an outer ambulatory enclosing the quatrefoil; it does not contradict the existence of a dome.

[127] N. [Nikolaj] Marr, 'Quelques termes d'architecture, désignant 'voûte' ou 'arc'', *Jafetičeskij Sbornik*, 2 (1923b), 137-167; E. Baldwin Smith, *The Dome: A Study in the History of Ideas* (Princeton NJ: Princeton University Press, 1950), pp. 14-5.

[128] This journal published works by other Russian scholars written in French and addressing 'Japhetic' themes in broader contexts beyond the Caucasus. Examples include D. Petrov, 'Quelques mots sur l'origine de la langue espagnole', *Jafetičeskij Sbornik* 2 (1923), 60-73; L. Ščerba, 'Sur la notion du mélange de langues', *Jafetičeskij Sbornik* 4 (1925), 1-19 ; V. Šišmarev, 'La légende de Gargantua', *Jafetičeskij Sbornik* 4 (1925), 166-204.

readership, perhaps out of respect for the scholarly audience he was addressing or in an effort to gain scientific recognition for his 'Japhetic' method. In the event, the conference proceedings would suggest that Marr's audience was not entirely won over by his terminological discourse.[129] In his text, Marr claims that the architectural terms denoting 'vault' and 'arch' in certain surviving Indo-European languages, such as Armenian 'kamar' (arch) and Greek 'kibōrion' (dome), are Japhetic borrowings (QT, 149).[130] Furthermore, he argues that the specialist technical function of these words as denoting architectural forms was a late development. In the distant past they referred to an abstract and not fully differentiated complex of ideas including '"tête", "montagne" et "ciel."' (QT, 143). This primitive celestial denotation survives in Japhetic languages such as Svan (QT, 142-3). The evolution of meaning, whereby words start out referring to a complex assemblage of ideas and over time come to denote more specialized aspects of this same idea, is explained by the action of unerring Japhetic laws of semantics (QT, 150).[131] The Greek word kibōrion—which Marr sees as a phonetic equivalent to the other words in the set—comes in for special attention. Denoting the dome as a feature in Christian architecture, it first occurs in the *Vita Porphyrii*, a biography of the 4th-5th century Bishop Porphyry including an account of his anti-idolatry campaign in Gaza.[132] This campaign involved the destruction of the Marneion, described by the Greek text as a domed structure. Marr argues that the Greek term is a direct borrowing from the language of the local Philistines, whom he claims were Japhetites; their use of this word confirms Marr's semantic analysis because the building it referred to, a domed temple in

[129] 'Le R. P. Peeters (Bruxelles), tout en rendant hommage à la science de N. Marr, un des plus extraordinaires polyglottes de notre temps, fait certaines réserves sur la méthode linguistique suivie par l'auteur de la communication. M. Pernot (Paris) s'associe à ces judicieuses observations.' G. Des Marez and F.-L. Ganshof (eds), *Compte rendu du V^e Congrès International des Sciences Historiques, Bruxelles 1923* (Brussel: Weissenbruch, 1923), p. 79.

[130] Marr unaccountably spells the word 'χιβώριον' rather than 'κιβώριον', in contradiction with the standard Greek edition of the *vita* (see below, p. 196, f.134) and to no discernible advantage for his argument. Although the word kibōrion is generally accepted as having an architectural meaning as 'dome' (along with its botanical meanings for a type of seed pod or water lily, as discussed by Marr 1923b, pp. 152-154), this definition has not been without controversy, owing in large part to the fact that the very first usage of the word in its architectural sense is, indeed, in reference to the Marneion—a building which no longer exists. Smith 1950, pp. 14-15.

[131] For Marr's semantic 'law' of increasing specialization and its possible source in Herbert Spencer, see Ekaterina Velmezova, *Les lois du sens: la sémantique marriste* (Bern and New York: Peter Lang, 2007), p. 357.

[132] Marcus Diaconus, *Marci Diaconi Vita Porphyrii episcopi Gazensis*, ed. Societatis Philologae Bonnensis sodales (Leipzig: Teubner, 1895). The text had been known to scholars only in its defective Latin translation until the publication of the rediscovered Greek original in 1875. Johannes Dräseke, *Gesammelte patristische Untersuchungen* (Altona and Leipzig: Reher, 1889), p. 215.

honour of a celestial god, embodies the primitive complex of ideas referred to by this set of words; the Gazan example helps to prove that 'l'idée de "voûte" et "arc"' in modern languages is expressed by words which formerly referred to '"ciel", souvent "cieux"' (QT, 140).[133]

Because of what the Marneion appeared to represent by way of pre-Christian architectural ingenuity, the building was an object of interest for Strzygowski as well as for Marr. Both scholars had to make do with a scarcity of evidence about the building. Any claims made about the Marneion were complicated by the fact that the only information about its existence was a short passage in the *vita*, and that the meaning of the word 'kibōrion' was not well established. The passage in question, whose importance will become apparent in due course, is as follows:

> the shape of [the Marneion] was round, being set about with two porticoes [stoaîs], one within the other; but the midst of it was a dome [kibōrion] spread out and stretching up on high[134]

While various scholars interpreted 'kibōrion' as referring to some kind of aperture or chimney, Strzygowski affirmed the view, enthusiastically endorsed by Marr, that a domed building was being described.[135] An impression of the building's appearance based on its description in the *vita*, included in a scholarly work cited by Marr, is reproduced below (Figure 4). It depicts the building's two porticos, one nesting inside the other, and its central dome.

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[133] The indigenous Gazans, Marr argues, spoke a Japhetic language of the 'Ionian' branch (1923b, p. 166). Elsewhere he states that, even if they spoke Syriac at the time of Porphyry's campaign, their vocabulary could well have contained many surviving Japhetic elements, such as kibōrion (155). Marr also claimed the Philistines for the Japhetic world in the German edition of the *Japhetic Caucasus*: Nikolaus [Nikolaj] Marr, *Der japhetitische Kaukasus und das dritte ethnische Element im Bildungsprozess der mittelländischen Kultur* (Berlin, Stuttgart, Leipzig: Kohlhammer, 1923a), pp. 16-17.

[134] Marcus Diaconus, *The Life of Porphyry, Bishop of Gaza*, trans. by George Francis Hill (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1913), pp. 85-6; Marcus Diaconus 1895, p. 62.

[135] Some scholars of the Greek text read 'kibōrion' not as a technical term denoting 'dome', but rather as a metaphor according to which the temple's central domical structure is likened to the *ciborium* over an altar. This view is dismissed by R. A. Stewart Macalister, *The Philistines: their History and Civilization* (London: OUP for the British Academy, 1914) pp. 110-1. Others read it as a botanical metaphor: 'kibōrion' is elsewhere attested as meaning 'water lily', which suggests Mark the Deacon was comparing the dome's shape to the seed-vessel of said plant (Dräseke 1889, p. 235, Marr 1923b, pp. 152-4). For Strzygowski's interpretation of the *vita*, see Strzygowski 1903, p. 101; *Ursprung der christlichen Kirchenkunst* (Leipzig: Hindrichs, 1920), p. 48; 'M. J. Strzygowski avait certainement raison en affirmant que χιβώριον était une construction voûtée à coupole', Marr 1923b, p. 160.

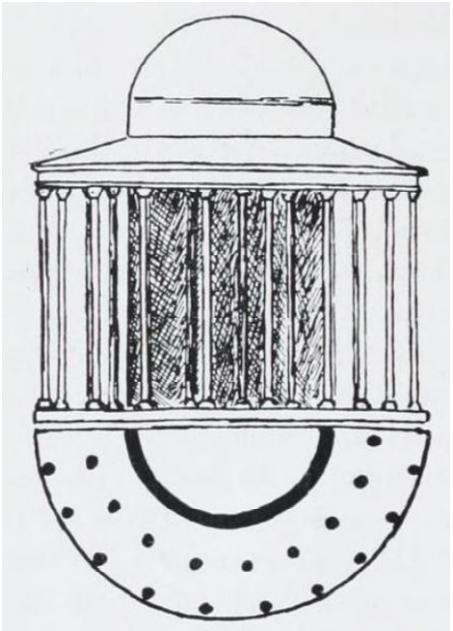


Figure 4. Sketch-plan and elevation of the Marneion at Gaza

The Marneion naturally drew Strzygowski's attention as an example of the formal inventiveness of the ancient architecture of the East which offered a wealth of ready-made building types for early Christian builders.[136] However, he viewed the Marneion as a formal dead-end and only touched upon it in passing. He interpreted the building's destruction, as recorded in the *vita*, as bringing about the total destruction of Philistine architectural tradition. The *vita* records that a church in the shape of a cross was built on the former site of the Marneion, which for Strzygowski signalled the planting of Christianity's 'Siegeszeichen' over the vanquished pagan world.[137] Bishop Porphyry's campaign of destruction signified that 'das neu emporwachsende Zentrum die Führung in künstlerichen Fragen zu übernehmen beginnt.'[138] Strzygowski did not view Gaza as a location in which pagan forms entered the Christian architectural repertoire because the city lost the *Kulturkampf* with imperial Byzantine Christianity. Only in the Armeno-Iranian zone did the dome, with the high degree of formal elaboration of the tetraconch, become a legitimate Christian form and begin its diffusion into Western Europe; buildings such as the Marneion are mere 'Einzelfälle' which did not lead anywhere.[139] Strzygowski's principal subject of interest, the hidden Eastern origins of Christian art, evidently appealed to Marr, who concurred that erstwhile pagans 'rapportèrent

[136] Strzygowski 1903, p. 101; Strzygowski 1920, p. 40.
[137] Strzygowski 1903, p. 138.
[138] Ibid, p. 138.
[139] Strzygowski 1920, pp. 47-48.

au sein du christianisme leurs idées enracinées et leurs goûts artistiques' (QT, 160). However, Marr was to offer an alternative account of the fate of the Marneion which challenged Strzygowski's single Armeno-centric diffusionist vector and suggested ways in which the old pagan artistry of Gaza survived Christianization.

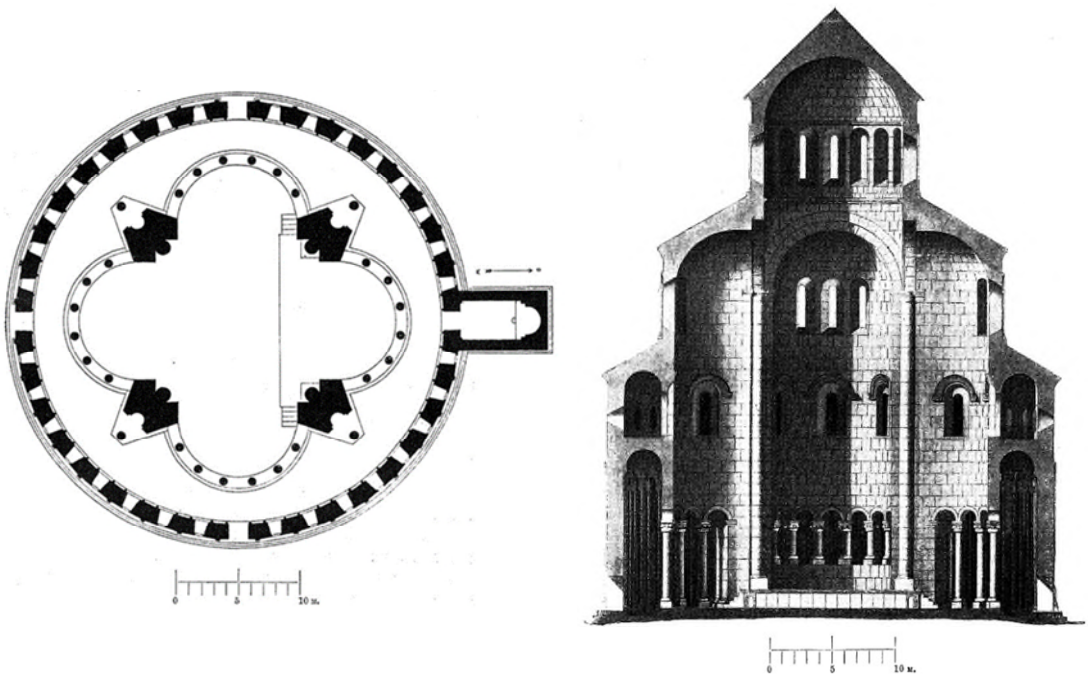
Marr's hypothetical account of how the Marneion was rebuilt as a church allows for the survival of local artistic tradition into the Christian era and proposes that the conflict with Byzantine power (in the form of Porphyry's campaign) spontaneously generated a shift to a higher order of architectural complexity as manifest in the new church. Much like the Marneion which it was built to replace, the church is only attested by the textual record.[140] The *vita* records that Porphyry had a vision that a church should be built on the site of the pagan temple.[141] He ordered that the temple be burnt with pitch and sulphur in order to expunge the abominable practices conducted therein, which reportedly included human sacrifice (VP, 78). After this was done, the pious folk debated whether the church should be built in the manner of the Marneion, or if the remains of the temple should be razed to make way for a completely new structure (VP, 85-6). Porphyry deferred his decision but received an unexpected letter, which he interpreted as a sign from God, from empress Eudoxia in Constantinople. She instructed that a cruciform church be built according to plans enclosed in the letter (VP, 86). Eudoxia later sent thirty-two marble pillars to Gaza to be used in the new church which was already taking shape at the hands of newly converted Gazans, working 'all with one mind and with the same zeal' (VP, 89, 94). This account strongly suggests that the Marneion vanished without a trace, confirming Strzygowski's sense that Byzantine authority prevailed in Gaza. However, Marr points to an ambiguity in the *vita*, which does not unequivocally state that the Marneion was razed or specify how Porphyry's 'vision' was realized, in order to hypothesize that the fundamental traits of the temple were incorporated into the church. Quoting the Greek text (here rendered in its English translation), Marr draws the reader's attention to an important area of uncertainty:

> L'incendie n'était guère provoqué pour anéantir toute trace de l'édifice:
> [Burn ye the inner temple unto the foundation ... But the outer temple leave

[140] It has been proposed that the former site of the Marneion is now the location of the Great Mosque of Gaza; Theodore Edward Dowling, *Gaza: A City of many Battles* (London: S.P.C.K., 1913), p. 79.
[141] Marcus Diaconus 1913, p. 55.

> ye with the court. And after the burning, having purified the place, found there a holy church], voilà les mots lugubres qui invitent la population à l'acte de démolissement. (QT, 158)[142]

The passage quoted by Marr seems to suggest that the outer portico (stoa) of the Marneion was left intact; only the temple's interior enclosure needed to be destroyed. Building on this point, Marr argues that Eudoxia's vision of a cruciform church could be reconciled with the round form of the Marneion, and that her church was built in part 'd'après ce qu'en savaient las Gazois sur leur temple païen' (QT, 157). The columns she sent could have been used in a new construction inside the temple's outer portico, producing an overall floor plan comparable to Zvartnots: a round church which 'porte en son sein la croix, formée par la combinaison de 28 colonnes.' Simply placing two pillars in front of each of the four piers rather than one would use up the thirty-two sent by Eudoxia. Marr refers the reader to Toramanian's hypothetical reconstruction of St Gregory's in Ani, a church with a virtually identical plan to Zvartnots, which I reproduce below (Figures 5 and 6).[143]



Figures 5 and 6: floor plan and elevation of St Gregory's, Ani, by Toramanian (1907).

Thus, Marr proposes that Eudoxia's church, built at the start of the fifth century in Gaza, comprised an internal quatrefoil structure (which fulfilled the requirement for

[142] Quoted in Greek by Marr (ellipsis is Marr's); Marcus Diaconus 1913, p. 76.
[143] The floorplan was also reproduced in Strzygowski 1918, I, p. 120

the church to be cruciform) surrounded by the circular portico of the old pagan temple, thereby generating the tetraconchal form which was the glory of Armenian ecclesiastical architecture from the seventh century and beyond. In Gaza this came about not through a singular architectural vision but through an ingenious act of modification of what had come before:

> Cette nouveauté changerait la correspondance de deux cercles simples de colonnes, dans le bâtiment païen, en la correspondance, dans le bâtiment chrétien, d'un cercle simple et d'un autre composé, arrangé en forme de croix, tour de force architectural, accompli par l'emploi d'arcs à console. (QT, 159)

The new church retained the dome from the Marneion, meaning that Gaza must also be regarded as a site where the indigenous domed form entered the repertoire of Christian architecture and began its triumphal march to the West (QT, 161).[144] The pagan form did not merely survive Porphyry's anti-idolatry campaign; the imposition of Byzantine authority forced an evolution of the form into a higher order of complexity: the domed tetraconch. This 'Bauform', accorded paramount importance by Strzygowski, may well have been the product of a unified architectural intention in Armenia; centuries prior in Gaza, Marr argues, the same form arose independently and at the intersection of competing architectural sensibilities. Marr presents the new church in Gaza as an instance of emergent complexity generated through the mediation of a divinely revealed architectural plan (aiming at 'l'anéantissement de tout souvenir' of the temple) by the artistic sensibilities of local builders who remained 'hantés par la vision de ce temple' (QT, 158).[145]

To recap: Marr's most innovative (albeit speculative) contribution in his 1923 paper is what he wrote about the construction of Eudoxia's church. He posits a process of formal progression, carried out over time and under the pressure of different aesthetic intentions, which accounts for the emergence of the church's

[144] Marr argues, contrary to August Heisenberg, that it was not only in Jerusalem with the dome of the Anastasis in the Church of the Holy Sepulchre that these pagan forms entered Christian architecture. Marr 1923b, p. 161, f. 2.
[145] In his account of the new church, Marr makes no mention of the Antiochene architect Rufinus who was hired to bring the empress's vision into being, as recorded in the *vita*. Marcus Diaconus 1913, p. 89.

characteristic form, the domed tetraconch: beginning with the indigenous pagan dome, followed by its partial destruction and the imposition of an architectural plan in the shape of a cross, and culminating in an ingenious synthesis which retains the 'traits fondamentaux' of the temple (QT, 159). The result embodies the same formal properties as Zvartnots but, unlike this Armenian church, Eudoxia's church was not the result of a unified artistic intention. The Gazan builders whom Marr credits with producing the new building were not pursuing a cohesive vision but were reacting to a violent disruption to the fabric of their city and to their former belief system. Indeed, artistic visions are less important than indigenous aesthetic sensibilities and intuitions and the technical know-how of local craftsmen: 'les artisans locaux, particulièrement les maçons, avec leurs procédés de bâtir habituels et leur terminologie traditionnelle' (QT, 161-2).[146] Complex forms can therefore arise even under unpromising conditions in spite, rather than because of, cohesive architectural vision. Marr's hypothesis about Eudoxia's church makes the case for separate independent development, according to which architectural forms do not diffuse from a single point of origin but arise independently of one another in separate places. Marr denies that Gaza is the only location in which pagan domes became incorporated into Christian architecture. He refuses to pinpoint the emergence of the structure to any specific point on the map and states that the term 'kibōrion' could be 'local' to many places on either end of the Mediterranean (QT, 167). He dismisses other scholars who identified specific buildings, such as the Church of the Holy Sepulchre, as prototypical of the Christian adoption of the dome (QT, 161). Marr deconstructs Strzygowski's Armeno-centric theory of architectural origins on two fronts: firstly, Marr's Gazan example antedates the adoption of the dome into Christian architecture by several centuries compared to Armenia; secondly, Marr's formal analysis demystifies what Strzygowski saw as the expression of singular (Armenian) genius by reducing a complex holistic form into a sequence of technical adjustments which, under analogous circumstances, are likely to produce the same result anywhere.

[146] Marr brushes over the considerable difficulties involved in joining a circular-based dome to a quadrilateral structure with four corners, a problem often solved through the use of squinches or ribbed arches. Specialist debates over the origin and diffusion of the ribbed arch continued through the 1930s. Maranci 2006, p. 315.

Despite the many novel theoretical features of Marr's 1923 essay, he nonetheless failed to fully transcend Strzygowski's ethnocentric theory of art in one important respect: Marr's persistent contrast between peoples that are rooted in their native soil, to which he attributes great creative vitality, and migratory peoples whose importance in artistic development he views as minimal. Although Strzygowski traced the movement of artistic forms through space, he argued forcefully that artworks were determined by geography and, relatedly, race.[147] The Mediterranean powers exercised a harmful influence over Europe's indigenous artistic traditions, stifling the 'bescheidenen, örtlich verschiedenen Anfänge der christlichen Kunst', which had arisen organically out of the native soil.[148] Over time Strzygowski's contrast between indigenous art and the 'art of power' (Machtkunst) became framed within another opposition: that between Aryan and Semitic currents in culture which coincided, at the end of his career, with an explicit endorsement of National Socialism.[149] Some of these motifs are evident in Marr's essay. Marr evokes the creative power of indigenous communities, the 'milieux locaux populaires', in almost mystical terms as the agents of artistic innovation, responsible for the transfer of forms from prehistory into modernity:

> C'est de là, de couches ethniques vierges, que les survivances se traçaient la voie dans l'art nouveau, que les aspirations populaires empiétaient, au domaine artistique, sur les tendances sociales nouvelles pour adapter à leurs goûts les idées dominantes du nouveau siècle, pour les revêtir de formes bien connues et produire un style moderne pour l'époque. (QT, 161)

Marr's evocation, in the same section, of the 'processus, qui s'opérait grâce aux courants souterrains, d'art et de religion, venant des masses ethniques de la population', and which could not be halted by the 'pouvoirs spirituels et laïques, soit l'église soit l'état', is an uncited paraphrase from Strzygowski's *Ursprung der christlichen Kirchenkunst*, the one work by the Austrian referred to in Marr's essay:

> Das damals unter dem Namen 'Persien' vereinigte Gebiet umfasst Länder, die nach den zur Verfügung stehenden Baustoffen und den bei ihrer

[147] See Thomas DaCosta Kaufmann, *Toward a Geography of Art* (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 2004), pp. 71-72.
[148] Strzygowski 1920, p. 40; quoted in Marr 1923b, p. 162, f. 1; cf. Maranci 2006, p. 314.
[149] Kaufmann 2004, p. 72-73.

> Verwendung von altersher entstandenen Werkarten sehr verschiedene Bauformen entwickelt hatten, *die sich aber freilich weniger in der höfischen Kunst der Diadochenfürsten, als in der volkstümlichen Unterschicht auslebten*.[150]

Strzygowski here is referring to the importance of Persia as, alongside Armenia, the point of origin of domical forms which entered the repertoire of Christian architecture in the era before the church consolidated its power and stamped out local popular forms in art and architecture. The close resemblance between these passages (the reference of popular artistic currents in opposition to institutions of hierarchical power) shows how much Marr concurred with Strzygowski's praise of popular practice as a source of artistic renewal and innovation. Both attribute vitality to some form of 'volk' or collective grouping. What is troubling about Marr's evocation of a popular creative substratum is that it reprises the mythic duality of organic gentiles and rootless Jews.[151] Indeed, in refuting the argument that Jerusalem was the crucial site in which the dome became a Christian form, Marr asserts that 'le monde sémitique n'était que porteur partiel des habitudes de culture, lesquelles continuaient à persister dans les milieux locaux populaires' (QT, 161). There is no equivalent anywhere in Marr's writings to Strzygowski's search for Christianity's 'vorjüdische' roots as 'eine Art ostiranischer Volksglaube.'[152] Nonetheless, Marr's anti-diffusionist argument about the centrality of indigenous practices could not be fully divested of any echoes with an Aryan-Semitic binarism in cultural theory, despite Marr's treatment of Gaza (and indeed Ani) as ethnically heterogeneous cities whose popular strata are defined not so much by race, language, or religion as by class.

Nonetheless, despite remaining partially trapped in a pre-existing paradigm, and despite advancing ideas which are speculative and unproveable, Marr produced a compelling alternative to Strzygowski which addressed some of the same themes pursued by the Austrian. Marr also produced ideas which, if deployed in a more measured way, allowed for a genuinely novel approach to studying how collective

[150] Strzygowski 1920, p. 45; emphasis added.
[151] Cf. Oldener's discussion of this duality in the work of Heder, Renan and others. Olender 1989, pp. 35-6, 114-23, 180-8. For its occurrence in the work of Matthew Arnold, see Young 1995, pp. 62-8.
[152] Josef Strzygowski, *Nordischer Heilbringer und bildende Kunst* (Leipzig and Vienna: Luser, 1939), p. 189.

will manifested itself in art. Marr's account of the emergence of the dome does away with the idea of a singular artistic vision or unified creative will. By contrast, the demands of geometry and the logic of spatial forms played are given greater importance. The artistic community of Gaza, and indeed of Ani, is defined in a way which is incompatible with the claims of ethno-nationalism. Marr did not support the exclusive 'right' of ethnic or linguistic groups to swathes of territory. While Strzygowski traced the diffusion of forms over long distances, which he correlated to the movement of peoples, the spatial category which featured most prominently in Marr's investigations of artistic trends was the city. In the city, Marr saw style emerge at the crossroads of competing artistic visions and without presupposing a continuity of ethnicity.

Marr's investigation of the dome, and the differences which emerge between him and Strzygowski, have significance beyond the confines of this one, rather esoteric architectural debate. The global glottogonic theory, exemplified by Marr's Stammbaum of 1926 discussed in Chapter 1, was firmly based on the principle of emergence. According to this account, language grew out of its disparate beginnings among disconnected tribes via a process of convergence.[153] A central tenet of Marr's glottogonic theory was that similarity between languages was not evidence of common descent but, rather, displayed the action of universal linguistic laws. As he argued in his 1923 essay, linguistic and architectural forms were equivalent in being subject to the same forces of modification and adaptation across time (QT, 157). It was with respect to language that Marr voiced his only explicit criticism of Strzygowski in this piece. While praising Strzygowski for identifying the role of 'prehistory' in bequeathing architectural forms to subsequent centuries, Marr criticizes him for excluding language from the field of investigation. Strzygowski had thought that, whereas architectural forms could migrate from the immediate context of their creation, language remained too deeply embedded in the life of the community which used it.[154] This would naturally undermine the validity of Marr's

[153] Marr [1924]b, p. 31.

[154] Marr agrees with Strzygowski in according prominence to 'les forms léguées par la préhistoire' when it comes to architecture, but disagrees with the Austrian's view that 'l'action de cet atavisme est plus illimitée dans les arts qu'elle ne l'est dans le langage, lui aussi du reste l'une des productions des arts humains' (162). This time Marr does cite Strzygowski, whom he quotes in the footnote, stating that 'die bildende Kunst von vornherein viel weniger eine Grenze kennt als die Sprache', and thus that 'ihr Ursprungs- und Wirkungsbereich, scheint es, [ist] unendlich viel ausgedehnter als der sprachliche oder sonst der Bereich einer Lebensbestätigung oder -wesenheit.' (Quoting Strzygowski 1920, p. 40).

investigation of the origins of architectural terminology from the distant Japhetic past. Strzygowski would seem to be following a narrow interpretation of Humboldt's dictum that language manifests the Geist of the people, to the extent that he could not countenance any transfer of linguistic forms between communities. In Marr's analysis, languages are constantly revealed to be hybrid (Basque) or the 'bearers' of linguistic survivals from the distant past (Udi—a North Caucasus language), which makes it impossible to reduce them to the expression of a single ethnic identities (QT, 163-5). Marr was interested in linguistic developments which played out across multiple languages. Individual languages and the communities which use them intersect with these developmental patterns but do not coincide with them in a stable manner across time.

The influence of the German intellectual tradition of valuing cultural difference on Marr, as well as Marr's choice to follow a separate path, offer us another angle for approaching the glottogonic theory besides the specific linguistic debates discussed in Chapter 1. The global glottogonic process involved constant linguistic hybridization, in much the same way that artistic traditions, as exemplified by Ani and Gaza, embraced heterogeneous influences from abroad. Marr's glottogonic theory was a response to a romantic view of the relationship between collective identity and language. German Romantics such as Herder and Humboldt had defended linguistic and cultural diversity as the expression of the creative Spirit of organic communities. Accordingly, difference was valuable and needed to be preserved because it manifests the variability of human genius. These arguments continued to assert themselves later in the nineteenth century. Marr's work directly intersected with a cohort of scholars in German and Austrian universities who built careers on their mastery of esoteric material which fell outside the purview of the dominant classicist academic current. In contrast to the triumphalist historical account privileging Greece, Rome, and the Renaissance, these outsider scholars foregrounded the East, the North, and the distant prehistoric past. They also directed scholarly attention to new forms of artistic creativity: applied arts, primitive arts, folk arts. The para-academic world offered fertile ground for Marr to develop his ideas about the separate independent origins of language in multiple outcrops of the Japhetic world. However, he achieved a key innovation which eluded most of his contemporaries including Strzygowski: through his work on architecture and

archaeology, Marr developed ways of divorcing linguistic and cultural difference from their putative base in ethnic and national particularism. According to his reconstructions of the cultural world of Ani and Gaza, the continuity of artistic forms does not necessarily imply a continuity of ethnicity. Instead, continuity derives from formal laws which are universal. The unfolding of these laws, in art as in language, exceeds the bounds of any one cultural realm (Kulturkreis): the dome, Marr argues in 1923, is equally 'local' to at least two areas which were not in direct contact with one another.

Nonetheless, Marr consistently mythologized the creative power of autochthonous communities, and this position was difficult to disentangle from the German outsider scholars and their valorization of authentically demotic art. This suggests a possible area of difference from Firmin, who sang the praises of the individual over the collective as a creative agent, and whose recommendations for Haiti's cultural development relied on severing the bond between language and the community commonly held to have produced it. However, Marr introduced certain theoretical innovations, absent from the work of his German contemporaries, which were designed to minimize the role of genealogy in cultural development: whether this be linguistic genealogy, expressed in the view that individual languages develop in accordance with an intrinsic governing principle specific to them, or the imagined lineage of human ethno-racial communities. With regards to Ani, Marr argued that it was not the continuity of the city's ethnic population—for there was no such continuity—which caused the city's artistic forms to develop organically across time; rather, it was the constant parameters of 'place'—broadly construed as the city's climate, geography, and locally evolved artisanal techniques—which produced this continuity of stylistic development. Marr was willing to extend the rights to the city indefinitely into the future to any group of people resourceful enough to make a go of living there. In his closing remarks in his 1921 article, Marr alluded vaguely to the political events that cut him off from the site, as well as the fate of the museum, photographic studio and boarding house he had had constructed there:

> La maison, autant que je sache, est démolie et ses matériaux distribués entre les indigènes du pays, braves ouvriers turcs qui partageaient avec moi consciencieusement les joies et les angoisses du travail assidu à la recherche des valeurs scientifiques : *sancta simplicitas !*

Although bitter at his former employees betraying the spirit of the dig, Marr absolves them of responsibility for their actions, albeit in patronizing terms. He does not interpret their action as being motivated by antipathy towards Armenians and assigns blame instead to geopolitical machinations of 'le XXe siècle, cette génération éclairée' (AVA, 410). This reverses the terms of the cautionary tale about God's wrathful destruction of the city, apportioning blame not to the decadence of its inhabitants but to the outside world at large (AVA, 306). From Marr's perspective the Turkish labourers have a claim to the site by virtue of being from the lowest strata of society. It is their simplicity that ennobles them. As in Gaza, what characterized Marr's view of the artistic community was not its ethnic identity or its genealogical descent down through time, but rather its relation to a specific geographical setting and its opposition to the big geopolitical forces which may eventually sweep it aside. Marr decisively rejected the view that descent or the possession of a noble lineage granted people a claim of ownership over artistic heritage.

In one of his very last publications, written after his return from a lecture tour in Turkey, Marr commended the new Turkish Republic for its preservation of antiquities and its multi-faceted research of pre-Indo-European languages (including Hittite, Etruscan and Lydian), conducted with 'loving devotion' by its scholars.[155] He applauded the 'rupture of Turkish scholarship with the European historical synthesis' which Marr saw as guided by an obsession with origins and lineage.[156] In Marr's eyes, Turkish scholarship had already acquitted itself well in its stewardship of the past, and had thereby persuasively asserted the new republic's claim of guardianship of its material heritage for reasons other than filial descent.[157] Marr valued what he saw as Turkey's post-imperial engagement with the past, in which ancient artifacts are not made to prop up claims of genealogical legitimacy. Firmin's cultural policy for Haiti relied on similar claims: namely, the delinking of French

[155] Nikolaj Marr, *O lingvističeskoj poezdke v Vostočnoe Sredizemnomor'e. Otčetnoe soobščenie po komandirovke ot GAIMK po istorii material'noj kul'tury* (Moscow: Izvestija Gosudarstvennoj Akademii Material'noj Kul'tury, 1934), pp. 11, 16.
[156] Ibid, p. 18.
[157] For details of Marr's visit to Turkey and his influence on Turkish linguistic thought, see Wendy M. K. Shaw, 'Whose Hittites, and Why? Language, Archaeology and the Quest for the Original Turks', in *Archaeology under Dictatorship*, ed. by Michael L. Galaty and Charles Watkinson (New York: Kluwer Academic/Plenum: 2004), pp. 131-53 (pp. 140-2).

from the origin story of the French nation and its appropriation, as an object of active engagement, by a new group of people.

## 3.5 Conclusion

Marr and Firmin diverged from one another in some important respects: Marr always thought of culture as collective rather than individual. Firmin, although he thought that cultures tend to reflect the habits and temperament of the community, believed that linguistic excellence was a matter of individual talent. Marr did not have to wrestle with race in the manner that Firmin did; he could simply deny the relevance of racial difference to language and move on. Firmin would have been unlikely to accept Marr's undifferentiated treatment of the creative masses and their culture-forging labours. Such appeals to communal harmony had, in the case of Cuba, led to extremely negative impacts for Afrodescendants. Nonetheless, Marr shared a key insight with Firmin: culture and language are tools, not 'gift(s) of nature'.[158] Marr's interaction with German scholarly currents helped him develop ways of doing justice to the scope and variety of cultures; however, for this intellectual legacy to serve his ends, he had to evacuate all correlations between culture and 'organic' communities.

The key intellectual legacy of German Romanticism was the argument that human nature is not the same everywhere but is most meaningfully embodied in separate national geniuses; that national artistic traditions and languages are the material forms of expression of distinct national geniuses; studying these forms recuperates the holism of organic communities which created them and which are threatened with loss since the onset of modernity. Over the course of the nineteenth century this body of ideas evolved and acquired a more markedly v*ölkisch* bent, which is to say it became associated with the claim that culture is subject to biological determinism; at the same time, the legacy of German Romanticism spurred interest in the study of artistic traditions from the distant past and from areas beyond the historiographical remit of the classical Mediterranean world. This tendency intersected with Marr's interests and concerns. His *Japhetic Caucasus* was

[158] Marr 1922b, p. 14.

very much a product of the German 'outsider' academic world of which Marr was a part and which tried to redraw the map of the known cultural world. Over time Marr came to distance himself from his earlier German contacts. Although this shift had personal and political causes, at an intellectual level it led Marr to reconceptualize the nature of the community, the recuperation of whose presence was the object of his linguistic and archaeological research. He worked out his cultural theory so that it implied the existence of a heterogeneous—rather than ethnically, confessionally, or nationally homogeneous—community, in line with his linguistic theories that strongly emphasized mixture and his archaeological research in Ani which revealed a city with a highly variegated past. Ani, moreover, revealed the existence of a continuity of artistic development which was not compromised by the violent upheavals that the city was subject to, and which repeatedly altered its demographic composition. Artistic style, the city's archaeology seemed to suggest, was the product of material factors of place and environment, technical processes embodied by artisanal practice and conducted independently of explicit artistic volition, and the aesthetic tastes of a populace not given to purism. Ethnic continuity was no longer a prerequisite for cultural continuity. The human agents whose presence Marr evokes seem, in Ani, disinterested in commemorating the past. When writing about Gaza, Marr evokes a community which does seek to recreate a pagan past which continues to 'haunt' it; they are acting not in pursuit of a unified aesthetic vision for the future. Nonetheless, a 'visionary' architectural form emerges at the interstices of their aesthetic sensibilities and the creative will of a conquering power, in which no party definitively wins out. This informed Marr's global glottogonic theory in which language likewise ceases to embody the presence of transitory human communities, but functions rather as the supreme externalization of human conceptual thought.

Marr's theoretical innovations stand in contrast to Strzygowski, his contemporary with whom he shared so many interests and concerns. Marr's involvement with German 'outsider' academia was long and fruitful in conceptual borrowings. Yet of all the figures he interacted with from that shadowy world, Strzygowski most resembles Marr in terms of theoretical sweep, breadth of cultural expertise, voluminousness of writing, and rebarbativeness of temperament. A complex figure with a heavily contested legacy, Strzygowski enabled the *völkisch* claim of exclusive racial 'rights' to the soil and simultaneously served as a

forerunner of 'UNESCO universalism' due to his 'redefinition of culture—against philological scholarship and classicist hegemony—as an organic entity possessed by the nonliterate as well as the literate'.[159] Yet are these tendencies wholly separate or are they two sides of the same coin? The claim that cultural difference is timeless easily leads to a claim that the ethnic identity on which it rests is itself timeless. This dilemma is the inverse of the problem of universalism with which this thesis began: how far is it possible to claim the equality, before the laws of historical development, of all peoples without erasing or negating the traits that make up the specificity of their culture? It is a persistent dilemma which, as we saw in Chapter 2, led intellectuals in Latin America to lay claim to a separate and culturally specific path to modernity. The discomfiting realization that respecting cultural difference in the spirit of 'UNESCO universalism' can also lead one to essentialize this difference lies at the heart of Jacques Derrida's analysis of Lévi-Strauss. Specifically, Derrida questions the politics of Lévi-Strauss' veneration for a primitive society which had seemingly refused to partake in the innovation of writing: 'Éloge de ceux qui ont su interrompre—pour un temps, hélas—le cours fatal de l'évolution et qui se sont "ménagé un répit." À cet égard et en ce qui concerne la société nambikwara, l'ethnologue est résolument conservateur.'[160] Marr did not wholly escape the constraints of the discourse of the time. He could never abandon the idea that behind the decisive cultural achievements of Afro-Eurasia lay the hidden agency of peoples which, however hard he tried to present as ethnically heterogeneous and socially constituted, embodied an organic vitalism manifest in their creative drive. Despite Marr's intentions, his writings lent themselves to political abuses. Marr's position has been characterised as a 'bizarre, not to say extremist, theoretical rejection of any migration in world history', grounded in the belief that 'it is not peoples who change their places but rulers and oppressors. It is the people, the '*khalq*', who are eternally and tightly bound to their 'eternal' and 'sacred' soil.'[161] Before becoming the first post-Soviet head of state of Georgia, Zviad Gamsakhurdia delivered a speech praising Marr for daring to argue that Georgians descended from the original though

[159] Marchand 1994, pp. 128-129.
[160] Jacques Derrida, *De la grammatologie* (Paris: Minuit, 1967), p. 188.
[161] Bert Fragner, 'Soviet Nationalism: An Ideological Legacy to the Independent Republics of Central Asia', in *Identity Politics in Central Asia and the Muslim World: Nationalism, Ethnicity and Labour in the Twentieth Century*, ed. by Illen van Schendel and Erik Jan Zürcher (London and New York: Tauris, 2001), pp. 13-34 (p. 20).

much diminished ‘proto-Iberian race’, despite this knowledge being suppressed by the Soviets.[162]

Equally, however, Marr’s work inspired a circle of critical thinkers who continued the struggle against metaphysical conceptions of culture as the expression of timeless ethnic essences.[163] These included the archaeologist Boris Bogaevskij who, in a review from 1934, skewered several recent Western publications on ‘Aegean culture’ for their theories of 'unidirectional migration' and of culture as a self-contained whole.[164] Having surveyed the literature to date, Bogaevskij argued that there could be no such thing as an Aegean culture in the abstract. There was no homogeneous Aegean cultural entity stretching across a contiguous swathe of territory, but rather a collection of multiple points on the map displaying varying degrees of similarity:

> ‘Aegean culture’ is really a union [soedinenie] of disparate local cultures, which in turn can be defined as nothing more than the aggregate [sovokupnost'ju] of material artifacts unearthed in a given territory; these artifacts will be found most frequently in one place while remaining largely or even completely absent from another place; in the latter case, the culture in question can be considered to be foreign. Such a 'materialist' definition of cultures has, as we shall see, solid foundations.[165]

Marr for his part contributed to the study of cultural history by defining culture in terms of its own specific laws and developmental processes, without calling upon the expedient of ethnic determinism. Although culture, in his view, was shaped by the creative energies of often overlooked communities of people, it was a skein that communities could intersect with but also pass through at various points in their histories.

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[162] Zviad Gamsakhurdia, *The Spiritual Mission of Georgia: A Lecture Delivered at the Idriart Festival in Tbilisi Philharmonic House 2 May, 1990*, < https://iberiana.wordpress.com/zviad-gamsakhurdia/mission/ > [accessed 30 April 2021].
[163] See Craig Brandist, ‘Semantic Palaeontology and the Passage from Myth to Science and Poetry: The Work of Izrail’ Frank-Kamenetskij (1880-1937), *Studies in East European Thought* 63.1 (2011), 43-61 (p. 52).
[164] B. L. Bogaevskij, 'Sovremennoe sostojanie izučenija 'ėgejskoj kul'tury' na Zapade i v Amerike i naši issledovatel'skie zadači', in *Iz istorii antičnogo obščestva*, ed. by B. L. Bogaevskij, S. A. Žebelev et al. (Moscow and Leningrad: OGIZ, 1934), pp. 7-74 (p. 23).
[165] Ibid, p. 12.

## Conclusion

We tend to think that writers and intellectuals from the periphery had to choose between rejecting or subverting ideas which were generated in the core; assuming, that is, that they were not happy merely to assent to the dominant discourse of the time. Contesting a dominant discourse is considered to be difficult, if not downright impossible, because if it has achieved hegemony then it will likely be able to foresee and forestall any attempt to negate it on its own terms.[1] If direct contestation seems destined to fail, a more promising avenue for critique would be the covert disruption of the dominant discourse from within. A more utopian alternative is to force discourse to recognize its own geographical limits, to subvert its claim of being able to master the world by revealing it to be the product of a subjective outlook that is spatially and culturally limited.[2]

Anténor Firmin and Nikolai Marr, however, employed strategies in their intellectual projects which fell outside the terms of this stark choice. Both diagnosed a set of unacknowledged myths and prejudices about the world which informed dominant theories of development as applied to race, language, and culture. The bulk of these *idées reçues*—their geographical range, ability to impinge on seemingly any field of knowledge, and their resilience to the progress of scientific knowledge—resembles Said's evocation of 'the sheer knitted-together strength of Orientalist discourse'.[3] Despite this, neither Firmin nor Marr was oppressed by the discursive setting in which they found themselves. Both were adept at constructing intellectual genealogies which allowed them to pinpoint moments when Western thought went off the rails. Both diagnosed a resurgence of Biblical creationism in the nineteenth century which was reflected in evolutionary theories that ranked varieties on a single scale (in the manner of the unequal merit accorded to Noah's offspring) and traced them back to an original moment of creation. According to this view, subsequent variation could easily be regarded as deviation from an ideal prototype: a single protolanguage or a biological prototype whose traits are unequally preserved by different races. Rehabilitating those forms which were disadvantaged by the

[1] Cf. Young 1990, pp. 141-2.
[2] Cf. Hatfield 2015, pp. 48-53.
[3] Said 1979, p. 6.

dominant taxonomic ranking could take the form of asserting their incommensurate difference. This was the strategy employed by Edward Wilmot Blyden with respect to Afrodescendants and by many of Marr's Georgian colleagues in relation to the languages of the Caucasus. It was not the strategy adopted by either Firmin or Marr. Both were committed to the idea that human variety could be comprehended by a single universal theory of development. Rather than seeing evolution as favouring one variety over all others, they presented developmental law as being constant and uniform in its influence, while giving rise to a variety of possible formations that emerged independently from one another across the globe. Fittingly, their intellectual sources did not evidence a repudiation of Western thought, but rather a selective reading which skipped over its more aberrant phases.

The reconstruction of Firmin's and Marr's sources, which were eclectic and wide-ranging, was the task of Chapter 1. The comparison undertaken there between the two thinkers leads us to the conclusion that with greater distance from the centres of discursive power came greater freedom from its normative influence. Neither writer was obliged to walk lockstep with the succession of scholarly paradigms to which 'establishment' scholars were beholden. Both had their para-academic standing to thank for this; Marr had the unusual privilege of being able to set a new scholarly trajectory in a post-revolutionary country. His use of scholarly paradigms not usually grouped together by intellectual historians evidences, in Patrick Sériot's assessment, 'the astonishing short-circuits, unexpected ellipses in the space–time continuum' typical of Russian scholarship of the period more generally.[4] The statement also applies to Firmin, with his simultaneous awareness of the unfolding sequence of scholarly debate and his willingness to forge strategic alliances with thinkers (such as Broca) no longer considered to be at the cutting edge.

Despite their freedom from certain constraints, Firmin's and Marr's intellectual constructs nonetheless generated problems of their own. In defending the coexistence of multiple centres of cultural development, both grounded culture and community in territory. Firmin tied the emergence of civilization to a people's adaptation to local environmental conditions; Marr repeatedly asserted the primacy of autochthonous communities and their resistance to the cultures of outsiders. In

[4] Sériot 2020, p. 4.

both cases, a connection can be made to (geo-)political schools of thought. In representing Haiti on the international stage, Firmin 'conceived the nation as an ethnoracial entity' and aspired to an international order in which distinct nation states respect each other's borders.[5] In Firmin's view, the territorial limits of countries and their spheres of influence coincided with the division of the world into separate racial zones: a consequence of the natural unfolding of evolution as discussed in *De l'Égalité*.[6] From the Bolshevik perspective, mobilizing the portions of Soviet society which had been marginalized by Tsarism meant first and foremost placing them on the map and embedding them in their 'native' territory. This territorial definition of ethnicity was encoded in the very name of the policy so described: *korenizacija* derived from *koren'* ('root').[7] Marr's Japhetites, however multifarious and broadly scattered as they were across the world map, all shared a defining trait: that of being the indigenous peoples of their respective territories.[8]

Subsequent political and intellectual commitments, as discussed in Chapters 2 and 3, tested our two writers' universalist world-historical schemes along these very fault lines. They each crossed paths with other thinkers from the margins who were, in a broad sense, anti-Western even if the cardinal points did not always align. They included José Enrique Rodó, with his rejection of 'nordomanía' or the slavish admiration for the United States and Josef Strzygowski, who celebrated the culture of 'Nordmenschen' in opposition to Mediterranean civilization.[9] On the face of it, Rodó and Strzygowski would seem to have been pursuing very different goals and to have had diametrically opposed views of the merits of classical antiquity. In other respects, their views aligned closely: they presented cultural difference in binary terms and claimed for themselves the virtues of spirituality, high aesthetic sensibility, and community in the face of materialism, utilitarianism, and 'rootless cosmopolitanism.'[10] Both thought that cultural identity was the authentic expression of ethno-racial community, and that ideals and beliefs lost their legitimacy when they became global. Rodó and Strzygowski can be viewed as representative of broader projects in which Firmin and Marr, respectively, were involved: the

[5] Charles 2014, pp. 72-3.
[6] Cf. Firmin 1885, p. 659, as quoted above.
[7] Martin 2001, pp. 10-12.
[8] Cf. Marr [1920], pp. 99-100.
[9] Cf. Coletta 2016, p. 36, Plontke-Lüning 2015, p. 221.
[10] Cf. Hatfield 2015, pp. 42-3, Pravilova 2016, pp. 91-2.

geopolitical consolidation of 'Latin' or 'Antillean' America in the face of US hegemony and the delineation of non-classical currents of European art marginalized by Rome. Firmin was drawn to *latinidad* because of its obvious value for achieving geopolitical balance; Marr's anti-Catholicism and his abhorrence of scholarship that neglected popular practice aligned with the foregrounding of indigenous creativity by Strzygowski and others. These were both perilous positions because they implied a normative understanding of culture and tended to define the community in ethnocentric terms—a fact particularly risky for Afrodescendants, as Firmin discovered in Cuba. Firmin and Marr had produced theories of evolution which, because of the differential function accorded to geography in defining separate evolutionary pathways, could easily be read as implying the existence of an organic bond between culture and ethnicity.

Nonetheless, Firmin and Marr ultimately were more successful than most of their contemporaries in valorising cultural difference without attributing it to timeless biological difference. As discussed in Chapter 1, their evolutionary thought could be summarized as the search to replace the single Stammbaum with a forest of trees. According to this view, although separate varieties evolve independently of one another, they do so in a parallel manner: they all trace an upward ascent, with varying degrees of convergence, and are comparable to one another at each stage of development. The comparability of separate cultures and civilizations results from the uniform and universal action of laws. The centrality of law to their evolutionary schemes, as discussed in Chapter 1, carried over into the way Firmin and Marr approached cultural difference in Chapters 2 and 3. Both thought that the distinctive features of culture, although complex, did not evade representation in abstract terms. The continuous development of language and artistic style across time thus did not have to be attributed to an unknowable life force. Such phenomena could be explained as growing according to their own intrinsic principles of development. We see this in Firmin's intervention into a philological debate, in which the unfolding of the French language—and the ability for the individual to interpret this process—are shown not to depend on any hypothetical continuity of the French nation. Rather, the language had been transposed to Haiti, where it had continued its development and already produced literature of merit. This was not presented as a case of cultural diffusion: Firmin was not advocating placing Haiti in a position of tutelage in

relation to France. Instead, he wanted Haitians to become adept and independent wielders of the burdensome linguistic legacy which had been left to them. Marr's investigation of the origin of the dome revealed that architectural forms are not tied to a particular ethnicity. The dome is a complex whole, but it is composed of simpler elements which are to be found in many different places. Its emergence is not dependent on a singular vision on the part of its builders but is the result of a sequence of actions which when replicated elsewhere achieve the same effect.

The comparison between Firmin and Marr has led me into an area of debate within the history of philosophy and science which I would like to develop further: namely, the discussion of 'non-organic' or 'non-biological' processes in the evolution of culture. It is a topic which I began exploring in an article which I wrote entitled 'Japhetic grammatology: Marr, Derrida and Archi-Writing'.[11] There I explored the way that Marr and Derrida, in parallel to one another, foreground technology rather than biology in the emergence of language. I believe that the discussion could be extended to other thinkers, especially those (such as Derrida himself) who came from and inhabited peripheral parts of the world. In expanding the discussion in this way, I would take inspiration from a fundamental principle informing Firmin and Marr: that analogous circumstances can produce comparable formations, but that when this occurs it does not mean that one formation is reducible to another as its 'derivative'.

[11] See above, p 3.

**Abbreviations**

AVA = Marr (1921), ‘Ani, la ville arménienne en ruines’

ERH = Firmin (1885), *De l'Égalité des races humaines*

LST = Firmin (1910). *Lettres de Saint Thomas*

QT = Marr (1923b), ‘Quelques termes d’architecture’

UHG = Braun (1922), ,*Die Urbevölkerung Europas und die Herkunft der Germanen*

VP = Marcus Diaconus (1913), *The Life of Porphyry*

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***Note.*** The *MHRA Style Guide: A Handbook for Authors and Editors*, 3rd edn (London: Modern Humanities Research Association, 2013) has been used as a guideline for referencing. Latinization of Cyrillic has been done according to the DIN-1460 system out of preference for its economy and lack of ambiguity compared to the Library of Congress system. The Georgian National System has been used for the Latinization of Georgian. Slavic names that occur in the body of the text have been rendered in a conventional rather than scientific way ('Nikolai' rather than 'Nikolaj'). Variant spellings of author names are indicated in the footnotes. Date of first publication is indicated by square brackets as relevant.


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