



Confronting European pasts in the present: theoretical reflections and methodological approaches to researching formations of ‘race’ and whiteness

Call for contributions for the conference of the Section “Migration and ethnic minorities” of the German Sociological Association (DGS)

Date: 9 to 10 Nov 2023

Place: Technical University Berlin

Organizers: Christine Barwick-Gross & Christy Kulz

Over the past decade the Black Lives Matter movement, de-colonial initiatives urging structural and material changes to our cities, curriculums, media reporting, or museums (just to name a few) and debates around xenophobia have worked to foreground within public discourse Europe’s colonial and migration histories. The racisms and discriminations produced by colonialism endure, traversing geographical boundaries. Colonial pasts are confronted not only within the space of Europe, but across the globe. Activist movements have ‘forced’ societies across the Global North to more actively reflect on how colonialism, racism and whiteness shape both institutional and material structures, as well as everyday affective contours. As sociologists engaged in research within these fields, we choose which theoretical perspectives to use when studying these phenomena, as well as what methodological interventions will be used to interface with and present the social world. This call for papers invites a dialogue around what theoretical and methodological lenses we use to study ‘race’ and whiteness in societies across the Global North and the Global South, and what sort of knowledge of the social world our approaches either generate or obscure. This connects to how ‘race’ is produced through a continuous, yet differentially regulated flow of persons, knowledge and materials between the Global South and North. We would like to explore these theoretical and methodological approaches by reflecting on three broad themes:

Race and Europe’s (post) colonial memory/politics of remembering

Notions of race and the establishment of racial hierarchies, based on supposed biological (and later cultural) differences between humans, were central to European countries’ processes of nation building and the development of modernity (Bhambra 2016, Goldberg 2006, Quijano 2000). From a similar standpoint, scholars like Bhattacharyya (2018) or Virdee (2019) focus on the role of capitalism and its reliance on a cheap labor force that can be exploited for the emergence of systems of hierarchies based on racial differences. Following this reasoning, scholars have also explored the racialization of Eastern Europeans, particularly Roma, in Western European countries (Boatca 2013, Kalmar 2022, Lewicki 2022). While most formerly

colonized countries have gained independence, the remnants of the colonial period endure, and with it structural or institutional racism and exploitation. While European societies have frequently denied the relevance of 'race', recent events, ranging from police brutality to Europe's deadly border policies, have brought issues related to race and racism to the forefront of public discourse. Following these developments, the first thematic focus addresses questions around Europe's colonial past, namely how these pasts surface in today's societies, how they are negotiated and what forms of conflicts emerge. We are also concerned with how the past can be remembered, whereby remembering is performative, intersecting and potentially 'multi-directional' (Rothberg, 2009). What do these conflicts and negotiations tell us about how European or national identities are constructed and lived, as well as notions of whiteness?

Making race through the city

The remnants of Europe's colonial period and the colonial order are still inscribed in urban spaces of both the Global North and South. To illustrate, the material structure of cities still includes street names and statues glorifying key colonial figures. Another example is the discursive designation by politicians and the media of some neighborhoods as problem areas requiring (political) intervention, a designation that is – implicitly or explicitly – based on the share of migratized and racialized inhabitants (Ha 2014), thus reinforcing racial hierarchies. Urban places such as streetscapes are shaped through struggles that revolve around identity, memory, and place (Rose-Redwood et al. 2018). In this session, we want to zoom in on local conflicts that revolve around issues related to race and European countries' colonial pasts – not only in European societies, but also formerly colonized countries. We thereby aim to understand how processes of place-making are shaped by local power dynamics. Meanwhile, we are also interested in how local processes become influenced by wider (national or supra-national) negotiations and conflicts around issues related to race and identity, and how these local processes feedback into the meso- and macro- levels through discursive, material or spatial practices.

Racial discrimination(s) and knowledge production

In this third thematic focus, we want to address racialized minorities' experiences with racism, as analyzed through a variety of methodological approaches, including surveys, in-depth interviews, ethnographic studies, or approaches that focus on the role of affective, material and sensory phenomenon in constructing race. By analyzing the extent and types of experiences of racial discrimination, we also seek to foreground the advantages and disadvantages that various methodological approaches have in terms of how they conceptualize, operationalize, and measure racial discrimination across a variety of societal fields. How do different methodologies generate particular forms of knowledge in relation to race and racialisation processes? How do these differing approaches shape research outcomes, and what do different forms of measurement hide or overlook? We also want to interrogate the role that reflexivity plays in studies on the production of race and racial

discrimination, such as the effects of the researcher's positionality, how categories are reproduced or altered through research practice, etc.

Time schedule

Please submit your proposal, including title, abstract (250 words max.) and contact details until 31.05.2023 via email to christine.barwick-gross@uni-flensburg.de. Notifications of acceptance will be sent out by 16.06.2023. The conference is planned as an in-person event. To facilitate the participation of international researchers, the conference will be held in English. Partial travel refunds for international participants are available.