

# The semantics of (anti-)racism in the governance of non-Europeanness: an introduction

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This special issue presents theoretical discussions and empirical research developed within the international project TOLERACE, The Semantics of (Anti-)Racism and Tolerance in Europe: Public Bodies and Civil Society in Comparative Perspective (2010–13), funded under the European Union's Seventh Framework Programme.<sup>1</sup> In this introduction, we present our approach to the study of (anti-)racism in contemporary Europe as well as the key issues explored in the research, which point to a persistent discomfort about discussing racism and to questions of academic compliance in knowledge production.

## Research questions

The TOLERACE proposal responded to a call within one stream of the Seventh Framework Programme, 'Cultural Interactions in an International Perspective', framed in the following terms:

The aim is to study European societies in a context of increasingly diverse cultural backgrounds. In particular, an assessment of multiculturalism, cultural interactions and their relationship to integration, social cohesion in urban spaces, tolerance as well as intolerance, racism and xenophobia should be addressed in order to provide recommendations for future European Union policies.<sup>2</sup>

- 1 The project was coordinated by a research team from the Centro de Estudos Sociais (CES, Centre for Social Studies) at the University of Coimbra, led by Boaventura de Sousa Santos, Silvia Rodríguez Maeso and Marta Araújo (Grant Agreement number: 244633). For further information, see the TOLERACE project webpage on the CES website at [www.ces.uc.pt/proyectos/tolerace](http://www.ces.uc.pt/proyectos/tolerace) (viewed 1 November 2016). We would like to thank the participants for their involvement in the research process for sharing their experiences and views in interviews and participatory workshops, and we are grateful to the grassroots movements for sharing their insights into everyday anti-racist struggles. We are also grateful to all the researchers involved in the consortium and the project's scientific consultants, David Theo Goldberg and Linda Herrera.
- 2 European Commission, 'Work Programme 2009: Cooperation. Theme 8. Socio-Economic Sciences and the Humanities', European Commission C(2008)4598, 28 August 2008, 14, available on the European Commission website at [http://ec.europa.eu/research/participants/data/ref/fp7/88813/h\\_wp\\_200901\\_en.pdf](http://ec.europa.eu/research/participants/data/ref/fp7/88813/h_wp_200901_en.pdf) (viewed 1 November 2016).

The relevant subsection, 'Tolerance and Cultural Diversity', was described as follows:

The fact of cultural diversity is sometimes seen as a feature of modern Euro-pean society. However, closer examination shows that European societies have always been—to a greater or lesser degree—diverse societies. In investi-gating whether European societies are becoming more or less tolerant and plur-alistic in their values and practices, researchers can help to clarify the concepts involved and determine those factors which have contributed, or can contrib-ute to, the construction and the maintenance of tolerant, culturally diverse societies with a view to better formulation of policies.<sup>3</sup>

There are different ways of responding to these issues. While the call pro-posed 'integration' as a desirable political solution for European societies (and, more specifically, urban spaces), the TOLERACE proposal considered it a hegemonic policy discourse that needed to be discussed critically.<sup>4</sup> The research call was tied to an understanding of 'the fact of [increasing] cultural diversity' as an object of research—although seemingly questioning it—thus promoting the idea of ethnoracial heterogeneity as a source of good or bad social interactions, and calling for adequate public policies to help societies remain tolerant. TOLERACE's research questions, however, were not framed to evaluate the extent to which 'integration' has been enhanced or challenged by multiculturalism or to investigate the role of racism and xenophobia in this process. Instead, they considered as problematic the way in which policy dis-course and practice on 'integration' has reproduced the political divide between a national, ethnically unmarked majority and the minoritized Other. Our proposal therefore aimed to understand the workings of racism as a routine political process that governs and polices this political divide. The boundary between Europeanness and non-Europeanness draws a line between the presumed 'democratic and tolerant values' of the majority and the presumed 'problematic characteristics' of the minoritized Other. Within this framework, racism is usually viewed in terms of specific acts of unequal treatment/discrimination against individuals that betray these demo-cratic values and institutional principles, and the collection and discussion of factual evidence to support such 'deviance'. Conversely, we viewed the com-bined processes of knowledge production and decision-making that com-pound public policy as both resulting from and reproducing racism. Thus, rather than an 'assessment of cultural interactions', we focused on the mean-ings of racism and anti-racism in different European contexts,<sup>5</sup> exploring how

3 Ibid.

4 In the meeting with the European Commission project officer prior to signing the con-tract, we agreed that the TOLERACE project would have a more in-depth focus on racism and not so much on the notion of tolerance, which was already the main focus of the other projects funded under the same call.

5 Denmark, France, Germany, Italy, Portugal, Spain and the United Kingdom.

they are being shaped through the mediation of civil society organizations, public bodies and policies at European, national, regional and local level.

## Research strategy

TOLERACE set out to investigate the configuration of regimes that legitimize, while also denying, routine racist practice in Europe. The research investigated the ways in which racism—deeply rooted in the history of European democracies and their existing socioeconomic and political structures<sup>6</sup>—still persists, despite increasing knowledge production in the field and an apparent political commitment to its eradication. In order to carry out this investigation, it sought (a) to explore how different concepts of racism and anti-racism are being shaped by public bodies and policies, as well as civil society organizations, at European, national, regional and local levels, and (b) to identify the impact of these understandings on the marginalization of anti-racism within current integration and inclusion policies in postcolonial contexts. The main fields for the analysis of the logics of contemporary institutional racism were employment and education, together with a consideration of how debates were framed by the media.

Our research followed a comparative analytical strategy that included (1) a critical analysis of public policies, initiatives and discourses on racism at European and national/regional levels, considering broader multicultural and intercultural political traditions (an average of two key policy documents were analysed per country); (2) the empirical study of local cases, focusing on how anti-discrimination and social integration measures in the spheres of employment and education are conceived, institutionalized and regulated on a national/regional level (this included interviews, focus groups and participatory workshops involving over 500 participants); and (3) an analysis of the role of the media in both the denunciation and reproduction of racism (over forty newspapers).

A historically informed and context-sensitive approach was developed. First, TOLERACE deemed it crucial to construct an approach that acknowledged the historical foundations of racism with a view to, on the one hand, moving beyond the dominant understanding of racism as beliefs or attitudes, which neglects its deeply-rooted historical foundations in European societies and political institutions, and, on the other hand, tracing the historical patterns of racism by engaging with the legacies of key historical processes—such as colonialism, nation-formation and their interrelation—within current

6 See Barnor Hesse, 'Im/plausible deniability: racism's conceptual double bind', *Social Identities*, vol. 10, no. 1, 2004, 9–29; David Theo Goldberg, 'Racial Europeanization', *Ethnic and Racial Studies*, vol. 29, no. 2, 2006, 331–64; Barnor Hesse, 'Racialized modernity: an analytics of white mythologies', *Ethnic and Racial Studies*, vol. 30, no. 4, 2007, 643–63; and Alana Lentin, 'Europe and the silence about race', *European Journal of Social Theory*, vol. 11, no. 4, 2008, 487–503.

discourses and policies on 'integration', 'inclusion' and 'social cohesion'. Second, by being context-sensitive, TOLERACE was able to build up an approach that considered a variety of political traditions associated with public debate on racism and anti-racist struggles, as well as debates concerning diverse populations (such as Islamophobia, anti-black racism, anti-Gypsy-ism). In this respect, the case-study approach provided an opportunity for in-depth exploration of a number of paradigmatic examples of the workings of racism in contemporary Europe, engaging with a range of historical, political and societal contexts.

## Racism and academic compliance

In recent decades, the connections between race, knowledge production and policymaking have become increasingly evident within race relations and the paradigm of prejudice studies, and in the minorities and immigration industries.<sup>7</sup> Insights into these connections were crucial to the TOLERACE project, given its focus on the neutralization of racism through its denial in decision- and policymaking, which has received the support of mainstream academic circles.

Historically, there has been little research dedicated to anti-racism, with academics often remaining complicit in, and providing the theoretical grounding for, political understandings of racism that have ensured the status quo of white privilege and western interests. In *The Silent War: Imperialism and the Changing Perception of Race*, Frank Füredi analysed the race etiquette emerging in the first half of the twentieth century among Anglo-American political and academic elites.<sup>8</sup> Studying inter-war diplomatic correspondence and political discourse as well as academic publications, Füredi noted a shift from racial confidence and superiority to racial anxieties and fear in the context of the perceived danger of the greater decline of the West following the moral crisis

7 See, for instance, Julian Henriques 'Social psychology and the politics of racism', in Julian Henriques, Wendy Hollway, Cathy Urwin, Couze Venn and Valerie Walkerdine, *Changing the Subject: Psychology, Social Regulation and Subjectivity* (London and New York: Routledge 1998), 60–90; Philomena Essed and Kwame Nimako, 'Designs and (co)incidents: cultures of scholarship and public policy on immigrants/minorities in the Netherlands', *International Journal of Comparative Sociology*, vol. 47, no. 3–4, 2006, 281–312; Stephen Small and John Solomos, 'Race, immigration and politics in Britain: changing policy agendas and conceptual paradigms 1940s–2000s', *International Journal of Comparative Sociology*, vol. 47, no. 3–4, 2006, 235–57; Alana Lentin, 'Postracial silences: the Othering of race in Europe', in Wulf D. Hund and Alana Lentin (eds), *Racism and Sociology, Racism Analysis, Yearbook 5* (Münster and Berlin: Lit-Verlag 2014), 69–104; Silvia Rodríguez Maeso and Marta Araújo, 'The politics of (anti-)racism: academic research and policy discourse in Europe', in Hund and Lentin (eds), *Racism and Sociology*, 207–37.

8 Frank Füredi, *The Silent War: Imperialism and the Changing Perception of Race* (London: Pluto Press 1998).

associated with the disclosure of the Nazi Holocaust and continuing discrimination in western imperial and domestic contexts. The emerging racial etiquette (illustrated by the founding of UNESCO in 1945) made it a requirement to condemn formally, while practically condoning, racism, as a means of deterring international mobilization around race in the context of national liberation struggles, the Cold War and the Civil Rights Movement in the United States. The 'silent protocol' on race accompanying this shift aimed to contain the reaction to racism rather than to tackle racism per se, and contributed to the idea that those demanding change were suffering from 'oppression psychosis', 'inferiority complex' and 'maladjustment',<sup>9</sup> thus pathologizing the collective struggles by the racialized while leaving the existing socio-political structures unscathed:

The focus on the psychology of anti-Western sentiment invariably distracts from the wider social and historical structures of western domination. By representing the reaction to racism as the pathology of the Marginal Man [reference to the 1937 book by Everett V. Stonequist], sociological theories of race consciousness helped to discredit it intellectually. The widespread influence of this outlook in the 1930s and 1940s helps place in perspective the intellectual climate on race. Precisely at a time when scientific racism was under attack and ideas of race equality were gaining currency, a rear-guard action was successfully discrediting the reaction to racism. The emergence of a moral condemnation of race consciousness may well have helped the West postpone the time when it would have to confront the question of racial discrimination.<sup>10</sup>

Social scientists have not only contributed to politically consigning racism to a marginal problem, as analysed in this special issue, but also to constructing denunciations and reactions to racism as illegitimate, which has served as a pervasive mode of evasion throughout Europe ever since. TOLERACE therefore engaged with the underlying notions of racism and anti-racism in politics as grounded in the dominant academic understandings that legitimize them. As with the historical constitution of the race relations industry, the contemporary immigrant and minority research industry inscribes the denial of racism within the production of knowledge. This has been analysed in detail by Philomena Essed and Kwame Nimako, for instance, in the Dutch context. In particular, Essed and Nimako examined the vicious circle of politics, policy and scholarship, in which dominant conceptual approaches— which tend to be state-funded, directly through commissioned work or indirectly via university-related institutes and professional NGOs, and increasingly EU-funded<sup>11</sup>—contribute towards problematizing minorities and downplaying racism. In the Dutch context, as in many others, the

9 Ibid., 2, 134–49.

10 Ibid., 149.

11 See Essed and Nimako, 'Designs and (co)incidents', 283.

development of a minority research industry has been characterized by opportunity hoarding by growing institutional consortia, limited perceptions of racism (and its denial), and the problematization of ethnic minorities.<sup>12</sup> As the authors contend, this is not merely a question related to the marginalization of a particular research paradigm; instead, it shows how hegemonic conceptualizations conceal the historical and institutionally embedded nature of racism. The starting point for TOLERACE was therefore to challenge the naivety with which political change is interpreted: in our research, we cast a critical eye on approaches that attribute the persistence of racism to insufficient public policies or their poor implementation.

### **The politics of (dis)comfort: defining racism**

TOLERACE's focus on examining the ways in which racism organizes policy decisions in contemporary democracies raised eyebrows in debates with fellow academics, EU project officers, decision-makers and social workers. In October 2010, for instance, the European Commission (EC) unit, Research in the Economics, Social Sciences and Humanities, organized a high-level meeting in Brussels, between EC officers and coordinators of projects funded by Sixth Framework Programme and Seventh Framework Programme schemes, on issues concerned with cultural diversity and tolerance. Our pre-sentation of the TOLERACE project highlighted three key aspects: our focus on semantics as an approach that 'replace[s] the problematics of empirical testing of racial attitudes and aptitudes with analyses of the body of discourse concerning race and racism';<sup>13</sup> our call for the historicization of racism, thus conceiving it as pertaining to the colonial formation of European nation-states and their governmentalities, and interrogating its postcolonial configurations; and our emphasis on the problematization of 'integration' as a public policy solution that shifts the focus towards presumed immigrant and ethnic minority characteristics and their assumed distance from 'European identities and values'.

There was evident discomfort among the audience in discussing racism as embedded in European public political culture and its (post)colonial genealogies/conditions. This led to a disproportionate questioning of our 'definition of racism', whereas most of our academic colleagues and EC officers seemed unconcerned with discussing the definition of notions such as 'integration', 'inclusion', 'social cohesion' and 'interculturality' or with clarifying references to 'faith organizations' or 'radical Muslims', for instance, as objects of study. This reveals the embedded relationships between knowledge and power that have made racism intelligible through its neutralization as the product

12 Ibid., 297–304.

13 See David Theo Goldberg, 'Introduction', in David Theo Goldberg (ed.), *Anatomy of Racism* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press 1990), xi–xxiii (xiii).

of erroneous and extremist beliefs. It also shows how the current hegemonic field of discourse and research on 'integration', 'social cohesion' and 'radicalization' is sustained through 'recited truths', as analysed by Alana Lentin and Gavan Titley, regarding the assumed 'realities' of multiculturalism and its declared 'crises' in European contexts. Recitation produces 'social facts through narrativization and repetition, facts which then appear as unconstructed to anyone'.<sup>14</sup> In this case, the facts of maladjustment: 'increasing cultural diversity' and the 'vulnerable and not-yet-assimilated ethnic minorities'.

The contributions to this special issue explore these 'recited truths' in policy frameworks and the regional, national and local contexts of policy thinking, policy-making and implementation. Engaging with the different historicities of policy intervention in each context, they unravel the prevailing political grammar that continuously redraws a fundamental divide between Europeanness and non-Europeanness. This grammar has been historically constitutive of 'Europe'; it has prompted the production of racial classifications and the terms under which its hierarchy is governed. Racism is therefore understood in our research as the assemblage of techniques for the political production and governance of the divide between Europeanness and non-Europeanness,<sup>15</sup> a conceptualization explored in greater detail in S. Sayyid's article. This understanding is uncomfortable because it confronts both its de-historicization and de-contextualization or, in Sayyid's words, the elision of its 'constitutive character ... as a form of politics in the formation of the European state'. Moreover, it unsettles dominant views that tend to discuss racism as pertaining to the realm of 'private', 'individual' hate speech or discriminatory treatment on the grounds of 'visible' racial markers, that is, skin colour.

The analysis of a wide range of policy documents and actors' rationalizations presented in this special issue identifies two overriding discourses and practices that reflect the workings of racism and legitimize its denial. First, there is the understanding of racism as the outcome of individual ignorance which, as Tina Jensen, Kristina Weibel and Kathrine Vitus point out with regard to the Danish context, is 'legally and morally sanctioned' and therefore based on the assumption that it cannot exist on a structural level. Accordingly, the experience of racism is seen more as a 'perception' than a 'fact'. Within this view of racism as (exceptional) individual prejudice, political concerns boil down to 'awareness' and 'sensitization' campaigns, as analysed by Silvia Rodríguez Maeso and Marta Araújo. Second, it involves the routine production of objects of policy intervention—'immigrants', 'ethnic minorities'—through the deployment of hierarchies that aim to regulate the distance from and affinities to Europeanness. Gabriel Gatti, Ignacio Irazuzta and

14 Lentin and Titley draw on Michel de Certeau's notion of 'recited truths'. See Alana Lentin and Gavan Titley, *The Crises of Multiculturalism: Racism in a Neoliberal Age* (London: Zed Books 2011), 18–36 (21).

15 See Hesse, 'Racialized modernity', 646.

María Martínez, for instance, point out that, in the context of education policies in the Basque Country, 'interculturality' is associated with 'policies for managing social problems', and 'the assumed social vulnerabilities of immigrant schoolchildren and their families, which are read as "problematic characteristics"'. Similarly, Ángeles Castaño, Fernando Martínez and Iván Perriáñez show how the call for 'normalization' and the rhetoric of 'interculturality' within integration policies in Andalusia 'determine who can become a citizen and who cannot be integrated. Ultimately, however, all responsibility is made to rest with the individual who has to show the will to integrate'.

Case studies have exemplified how racism is embedded in the routine, everyday practices of public bodies and institutions; it determines life chances, from access to citizenship to good quality education. From this perspective, our conceptualization engages with Philomena Essed's notion of 'everyday racism':

Everyday racism is the integration of racism into everyday situations through practices ... that activate underlying power relations. This process must be seen as a continuum through which the integration of racism into everyday practices becomes part of the expected, of the unquestionable, and of what is seen as normal by the dominant group. When racist notions and actions infiltrate everyday life and become part of the reproduction of the system, the system reproduces everyday racism.<sup>16</sup>

Equally crucial to our understanding is the interrelation between racism and dehumanization. According to Ruth Wilson Gilmore: 'In the contemporary world, racism is the ordinary means through which dehumanization achieves ideological normality, while, at the same time, the practice of dehumanizing people produces racial categories.'<sup>17</sup> Dehumanization qua racialization is therefore a quite conventional process that legitimizes exclusion and discrimination in the name of integration, democracy and human rights.<sup>18</sup>

16 Philomena Essed, *Understanding Everyday Racism: An Interdisciplinary Theory* (Newbury Park, CA, London and Delhi: Sage 1991), 50.

17 Ruth Wilson Gilmore, *Golden Gulag: Prisons, Surplus, Crisis, and Opposition in Globalizing California* (Berkeley, Los Angeles and London: University of California Press 2007), 243.

18 See Frantz Fanon, *Black Skin, White Masks* [1952], trans. from the French by Richard Philcox (New York: Grove Press 2008).