

Migration and Racism in the United States and Germany in the Twentieth Century

Veranstalter: Maria Alexopoulou, Center for Research on Antisemitism, Technical University of Berlin / Research Institute Social Cohesion; Elisabeth Engel, German Historical Institute (GHI) Washington

Datum, Ort: 22.04.2021–23.04.2021, digital

Bericht von: Tanja Gäbelein / Joseph Wilson, Research Institute Social Cohesion, Berlin

Both US-American and German history are marked by migration and racism. Throughout history, some groups in both societies have been racialized and marginalized. After the end of National Socialism in Germany and segregation in the United States, exclusion and othering continues. Commonalities in the construction of these „others“ can often be identified, but differences in migration histories and contexts also exist. In order to analyze the interlinkage of these phenomena, scholars were invited to present their research projects. A year after the original on-site workshop was postponed, the conference was condensed to lighting talks and more extended overall discussions at the end of each day.

In her opening words, GHI Washington director Simone Lässig stressed the importance of transnational research exchange in the comparative field, as binational comparison cannot be drawn from a national perspective. Referring to the recent Black Lives Matter movement, Maria Alexopoulou then went on emphasizing the deep entanglement of migration, racism and anti-racism in Germany and the United States, stating, together with Elisabeth Engel, the need for a better academic understanding of these phenomena.

ANNE-KATHRIN WILL (Berlin) gave a presentation on the relationship between statistical surveys, categorization and concepts of (non-)belonging. Her research focuses on the population censuses of the *Bundesstatistikamt* in Germany, which has been collecting figures on the German population since 1953. Specifically, she examined those categories that were introduced to differentiate between „Germans“ and „non-Germans“. Since these categories were predefined and respondents

had to classify themselves within them, belonging or non-belonging resulted from the categories of the authority. Thus, Will could show that the analysis of categories such as „foreign-language“ or „national origin“ reveals hierarchies and brings to light prevailing notions of belonging and non-belonging.

LÉA RENARD (Berlin) presented an insight on the empirical analysis she conducted for her PhD thesis. Focusing on the construction of otherness through statistical knowledge production between the early years of the German Empire and the outbreak of World War I, she identified two guiding principles of classification: the national and the colonial principle. According to Renard, the former was applied on the territory of the German Empire, first distinguishing between citizens and foreigners on the basis of citizenship. Second, categories like „language“ and „birthplace“ were used to foster the image of a mono-ethnic German nation since 1900. At the same time, on colonial territory German authorities introduced a racist binary classification between a perceived „white population“ on the one hand and a perceived „colored population“ on the other. Within this process, people who would formerly assume a role in between were forced into the „colored“ category.

Migration scholar PAYAL BANERJEE (Northampton, MA) contributed the main aspects of her actual research on modern eugenicist thinking shaping US and European immigration policies. Adopting a transnational perspective, she analyzed the historical and ongoing preference of the US migration office for white European immigrants as guided by an underlying yet not openly expressed racist and eugenicist thinking. At the basis of modern migration laws in the US and in Europe, Banerjee identified the category of usefulness being applied to aspiring immigrants. This modern form of eugenicist thinking continues to distinguish between worthy and worthless people while simultaneously using racist categories to identify those who are deemed of use for the future nation and those who presumably are not.

ADAM SEIPP (College Station, TX) provided an insight into the intersection of racism

and state sovereignty in postwar Germany. In this regard, he studied the stationing of Afro-American G.I.s in Germany in the 1940s and 1950s. As part of the Allied military forces, they enjoyed more freedoms in Germany than they did in the US South. At the same time, they also experienced racism in Germany. Thus, American and German concepts of race and racism interacted, creating what Seipp called a „toxic stew of racism“. In addition, Seipp examined the power relationship between Germany and the US. Elaborating on two disputes over the stationing of African-American soldiers in Germany in the 1950s, he showed that the ability of a state to institutionally act out racism (by declaring who can stay on the states' territory) depends on a state's sovereignty.

Similar to Seipp, ARVID SCHORS (Cologne) shared his findings on a specific group of G.I.s. Approximately 30,000 German-speaking Jews who were forced to leave Germany or Austria in the 1930s, managed to return to Germany in the 1940s as soldiers of the Allied forces. What Schors calls a „remarkable transition“ can be observed in their transition from victims of persecution to actors in power positions. At the same time, they also experienced anti-Semitism in the U.S. and were subject to suspicion because of their German origins. Despite all ambivalences, Schors pointed out that contemporary US was always perceived as a safe haven for German and Austrian Jews.

Building on her PhD thesis on intimate histories of African Americans and Germans since 1945, NADJA KLOPPROGGE (Gießen) elaborated on the cases of six African-American soldiers who applied for asylum in the German Democratic Republic in order to settle down and marry their white West German girlfriends. Klopprogge showed how in these cases, migration was motivated by the desire of domesticity, which was considered a sign of integration, but remained precarious due to racist notions of a presumed white German and a black African-American nationhood. Their asylum claims were reformulated by Stasi officials in order to turn the former G.I.s into socialist fighters eventually ready to relocate „home“ (the U.S.) in order to advance the cause of socialism and simul-

taneously eliminate racism. Nevertheless, all African-American G.I.s managed to stay in Germany for the rest of their lives.

ANNA HOLIAN (Tempe, AZ) presented her research project on discourses surrounding anti-Semitism in postwar Germany. Eastern European Jews arriving in West Germany were associated with smuggling and shadow economy. Jewish foreigners were seen as a danger to the German economy because they were believed to be evading taxes. German authorities acted aggressively against Jewish businesses with searches, deportations, fines and raids. This created an increasingly hostile environment, which had a massive impact on the lives of Jews living in postwar Germany.

ISMAEL GARCIA-COLÓN (New York) elaborated on the intersection between labor migration, racism and colonialism based on his latest publication on Puerto Rican farm labor migration to the United States. Garcia-Colón explained the difficult status Puerto Ricans occupy within the US citizenship system. Due to the country's colonial status, especially Puerto Rican labor migrants are seen as racialized others within the US. However, they are also non-deportable US-citizens. Treated rather similar to migrant workers, their non-deportability is conceived as an obstacle by white US-farm owners. Therefore, the introduction of an increasing corpus of laws discriminating against Puerto Rican farm workers can be observed, favoring labor migration of deportable migrant groups.

LAUREN STOKES (Chicago, IL) presented the core thesis of her first book in which she examined social science research on guest workers in the 1960s and 1970s. While comparing Germany and the U.S., these scholars drew analogies from the situation of guest workers in Germany to that of African Americans and Puerto Ricans in the US. Thus, these scholars categorized African Americans and Puerto Ricans (both U.S. citizens) as racialized foreigners. Stokes emphasized that this racialization process as well as the concept of race is never mentioned in the German social science of the time since race as a term was delegitimized.

MADHU (New Delhi) spoke on the criminal justice system as a tool historically and currently used by the US government to en-

force deportation and therefore manage migration. In two examples, Madhu showed how migration law and criminal law have been connected historically in order to justify the deportation of migrants long before the Patriot Act following 9/11. The systematic criminalization as witnessed today can be traced back to the treatment of migrant workers from China in the late 19th century as well as Mexican migrants in the 1920s. What connects these policies seems to be the racist ascription of criminal acts to migrant groups as well as the creation of laws specifically targeting migrants.

Radicalization prevention and the conventional security studies are the object of investigation of KATHARINA LEIMBACH (Hanover). She explained how the focus of German security authorities lies on preventing jihadism while neglecting right-wing extremism. Through interviews with prevention experts, she showed that the German extremism prevention system perceives jihadism as a problem by conceived „others“. For many experts, the dividing line between Islam, Muslims and jihadism becomes blurred. In the fight against terrorism, they reinforce racism by perceiving a large population group as a potential risk while right-wing extremism, a phenomenon of mainstream society, is downplayed.

LILI REBSTOCK (Dresden) focused on the nexus of migration and racism in the German Democratic Republic, particularly taking into account the experiences of contract workers in the 1980s. In addition to the racist violence many contract workers faced, Rebstock closely explored institutionalized forms of racism against contract workers, especially concerning their housing, working and living conditions. Thereby, she identified the state practice of deportation in case of pregnancy as an institutional racist and sexist practice which denied basic human rights to the workers, reducing them to the use of their work force only. In another case, she outlined the colonial resemblance of many Mozambican workers' experiences, whose wages were partially or entirely used to pay the debt of the Mozambican state to the GDR. Additionally, Rebstock finds that the GDR's official anti-racist self-image was an obstacle to efficiently

encountering racist practices on the personal as well as on the state level.

In the final presentation, RUDOLF LEIPRECHT (Oldenburg) and HELMA LUTZ (Frankfurt am Main) urged the German academia to apply an intersectional use of the term „racism“. Because the term „race“ was avoided after the Shoah, Leiprecht and Lutz clarified, „culture“ was brought in as a terminological hiding place. While acknowledging the differences between anti-Semitism, colonial racism, and anti-Muslim racism, they also argued for recognizing the commonality that lies in the construction of the „other“.

At the end of both days, all participants were invited to enter into an open discussion. A central topic was the divergent understanding of race and racism in the US and Germany. This is largely due to the different historical developments and current uses of the terms in both countries. Especially in the white German public, the term „race“ is still closely related to anti-Semitism and the Nazi regime. Therefore, racism is oftentimes believed to have disappeared after the defeat of National Socialism. However, some participants argued in favor of using „race“ as an analytical category in German academia and fostering the analysis of systemic dimensions of racism in Germany.

Regarding the relation between racism and migration, participants argued that the categorization as migrant in both countries is still largely influenced by racist thinking. Therefore, researchers are asked to reflect on how they apply the term „migrant“ in their work. Furthermore, it was outlined that with the global movement of migrants, also knowledge about racism travels. This is largely enhanced with the rise of digitization, which allows the global sharing of anti-racist knowledge and practices as well as racist ideas and practices.

Finally, participants identified anti-racism as a separate research field. They agreed on the need to further include the categories of class, power status and gender into the analysis of both racism and anti-racism.

Conference overview:

Simone Lässig (GHI Washington), Elisabeth

Engel (GHI Washington), Maria Alexopoulou (Technical University Berlin / Research Institute Social Cohesion): Welcome and Introduction

Anne-Kathrin Will (Humboldt University Berlin): Stories of (Non-)Belonging in German Population Statistics (1933-Today)

Léa Renard (Free University Berlin): Stories of (Non-)Belonging in German Population Statistics (1871-1914)

Adam Seipp (Texas A&M University, College Station): „We Are Not a Colonial People“: Race, Sovereignty, and the US Army in Germany, 1950-56

Payal Banerjee (Smith College, Northampton, MA): Immigration Status Exclusions, Eugenicist Thinking, and US Racial Formation through the 21st Century

Arvid Schors (University of Cologne): Just Different Shades of Racism? German-Speaking Jewish Emigrants as Victims of National Socialism and as U.S. Citizens and Soldiers, 1933-1947

Nadja Klopprogge (Justus-Liebig-University Gießen): „To Live a Peaceful Life“: African American Asylum Seekers in the German Democratic Republic

Anna Holian (Arizona State University, Tempe, AZ): Antisemitism and Jewish Economic Life in Postwar Germany

Ismael Garcia-Colón (City University of New York): Braceros, Colonial Migrations, and Racialization: Puerto Rican Migrant Farmworkers in the United States

Lauren Stokes (Northwestern University, Chicago, IL): The „African-American Analogy“ and the Racialization of the Guest Worker

Madhu (Miranda House, University of Delhi): Immigration, Crime and Race in the United States

Katharina Leimbach (Leibniz University of Hanover): Caught Up in the Minutiae: How the Prevention of Extremism and Terrorism Contains and Produces Racist Practices

Lili Rebstock (Dresden University of Technol-

ogy): The Nexus of Migration and Racism within the Last Decade of the GDR

Rudolf Leiprecht (Carl von Ossietzky University, Oldenburg), Helma Lutz (Goethe University, Frankfurt am Main): Name It Racism! A Plea for an Intersectional Use of the Term Racism in German Academic Discourse

Tagungsbericht *Migration and Racism in the United States and Germany in the Twentieth Century*. 22.04.2021–23.04.2021, digital, in: H-Soz-Kult 16.07.2021.