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Introduction: Discussing »Tacit Racism«

Michi Knecht and Martin Zillinger

Two years after the murder of George Floyd by a police officer in Minneapolis, and sixteen years after Oury Jalloh was abused by police in Dessau and then burned to death in police custody under circumstances that are still not clear, at a moment in time, in which the state of research with regard to systematic racist violence in the police has large gaps, especially in Germany (Hunold and Wegner 2020, KOP – Kampagne für Opfer rassistisch motivierter Polizeigewalt 2021) what can cultural and social sciences do? What is their task in the midst of intensified societal polarization, one of the salient features of which is the rise of both recurring and new forms of racism as well as the struggle and protest against many forms of group-based misanthropy? In a time of proliferation of openly displayed, shamelessly exhibited and publicly performed acts of racism in the streets, in parliaments and educational institutions, in old and new media, what methodological and analytical possibilities can the humanities and social sciences muster to make the scope of the problem visible and contribute to change? Why, in other words, do we turn towards more hidden, unconscious, or tacit practices of racism and why should that be helpful in a moment, in which the debate in Germany about the necessity of empirical social science research on systematic police violence has not yet been won (at least not at the federal level) and in which social and cultural scientists like Didier Fassin in France are commissioned by victims of police violence to conduct ethnographic counter-investigations? It is

in the context of these and related questions that we invited Anne Rawls and Waverly Duck to contribute an essay to this debate section and introduce the argument of their book *Tacit Racism*, published just a few months before we started to prepare this issue. *Tacit Racism is Institutionalized in Interaction in the US: What about Elsewhere?* invites readers and fellow commentators to explore how racism is co-produced in interaction. It therefore advances an argument that tries to complement existing research in, for example, Critical Race Theory by asking »how the inequalities that have been documented [...] in the large scale economic and social relations [...] and the differences revealed by research on intersectionality, translate into interactional practices« (in this volume, p. 214). The authors thus direct our attention to aspects of our daily lives where we might least expect to find racism at work – in the very micro-practices by which we co-produce our social worlds. Those are situated practices, and they are likely to differ between societies. The authors challenge us to think about how racism is encoded in the everyday social expectations in societies other than the U.S. with its particular history of racism, labour exploitation and inequalities.

In recent years, diverse forms of racism, antisemitism and other forms of systematic discrimination and neo-colonial orderings have taken centre stage in public debates in Europe. In Germany, pioneering work of authors such as Annita Kalpaka and Nora Räthzel (1986), Mark Terkessidis (1998, 2004, 2019), Erol Yildiz

(1999, 2014), Pipo Bui (2004), Paul Mecheril (2007), Serdal Güler (2009), Ilka Eickhoff (2010) and Annita Kalpaka, Nora Rätzzel and Klaus Weber (2017) have helped paving the way for a new generation of public intellectuals raising their voices on racism (Amjahid 2017, 2021; Hasters 2019, 2020; Kelly 2021) and demanding a public debate on long standing forms of discrimination. Scholars like Arndt (2005), El-Tayeb (2001, 2016), Foroutan (2019), El Mafaalani (2021) have helped to establish the crucial importance of these topics for social and cultural theory, as much as for a functioning democratic society.

In hindsight, it can only be called a major scandal in the history of European and North American *Geistes- und Sozialwissenschaften* (humanities and social sciences) that, for too long, majority thinkers have treated the suppression of minority scholarship and racism as side issues (for an analysis of the situation in American Anthropology see Allen and Jobson 2016). They have thus contributed to »trivialize the centrality of the problem... and allowed it to fester«, as Waverly Duck and Anne Rawls argue in their contribution (see p. 211 in this volume). They remind us that the marginalization of voices that have tried to do otherwise has contributed to upholding the illusion that racism is not a problem within the workings of democratic, Western societies and, by extension, within their universities (in this volume, p. 211). The need to address racism and to decolonize academia applies to all disciplines, and even though the topic has gained some ground in recent years, the difficulty scholars continue to face when trying to build a career on this topic bears witness to this history of continuous neglect and rejection. Moreover, a short survey of the diversity of students' and university teachers' bodies, for example in German universities, makes it poignantly clear that the trivialization of the topic has had far reaching consequences for universities and the societies they are meant to serve. Students, who are continuously exposed to racism at the university, have started to form associations and organize

workshops to counter racism. Whoever attends one of these self-help forums (often instigated by AStAs at universities and independent student organizations) cannot but fall silent in view of the painful reports of BPOC-students recounting their experiences with teachers, administrators and fellow students. The pain, tears and fears, that the very institution that is meant to produce and protect a community of learning, inflicts on the young people who strive for knowledge and education are not only shameful, but testify to systematic and endemic forms of exclusion. It is one of the unsettling arguments of Duck's and Rawls' article that such forms of exclusion are normalized or even naturalized, when they are either primarily rendered as problems of individual mind-sets (and thus located at the level of individuals), or somehow ascribed to the workings of structures and institutions (and thus at least partly out of reach).

In their paper, Waverly Duck and Anne Rawls propose to revisit forms of everyday racism, not at the margins of societies but in their midst – directing their empirically detailed attention to routines, tacit expectations and systemic, and often unconscious, patterns of racist interaction. It is a privilege of White people and a structural feature of racialized societies that such patterns are often little commented upon in diverse publics and equally little reflected upon in the everyday lives of many Whites (Cakaya and Mepschen 2019). Waverly Duck and Anne Rawls explore how systemic racism is »institutionalized in taken-for-granted practices of interaction«, in what they call »interaction orders of race«. Both have been working together on this for many years. Their perspective is primarily sociological, more specifically: ethnomethodological. One of the crucial features of ethnomethodological research is to foreground practice to all other elements in a given situation or social setting. In many ways this is counter-intuitive, since most social and anthropological theories continue to invoke structures and institutions to explain social orders (and thus, for example, how a regime of White

supremacy is enacted) or actions and actors with their intentions and identities to explain practices (and thus, for example, racist discrimination). Following Garfinkel, the authors turn this taken-for-granted model of the social world on its head and zoom in on the modes in which structures, actions and intentions are co-constituted in interaction. For this purpose they lead us into the ethnomethodological world of micro-studies and sequential analyses.

Inspired by W.E.B. Du Bois' concept of »double consciousness« (which, as Meyer remarks, must also be understood as »double membership«) and Harold Garfinkel's ethnomethodology Rawls and Duck carve out what they call »grammars of interaction« (see the responses by Jean Beaman and Christian Meyer). These racist grammars of interaction are empirically investigated in three diagnostically rich situations of interaction, partly under laboratory conditions and partly on the basis of filmed visual sources which are later analyzed: situations of »first contact« in everyday life, of systematic devaluation of *Black* people in professional roles, and a hard-to-bear scene of an interaction between *White* police officers and a *Black* civilian. (We need to issue a trigger warning at this point: The description of this interaction does not entail physical violence but may nevertheless have retraumatizing effects in some circumstances.)

There is, of course, a thoroughly extensive body of research, for example on the phenomenology of racism (reports and auto-ethnographies from the perspectives and experiences of those repeatedly affected by racism in everyday life) as well as on everyday racism (Essed 1990) as a systematic and structural problem anchored in the centre of social reproduction, representational strategies, and forms of interaction. Notably institutionalized forms of everyday racism have been widely researched (see only as examples Fassin 2016 and 2021; Heinemann and Mecheril 2017; Hunold and Wegner 2020, Jäger 1992, Terkessidis 2004, Wacquant 1997). Schools, labour markets, educational systems, housing and

the media have been studied in terms of how they not only absorb and transmit racist and racializing discourses, but also in terms of how they independently produce discrimination and disadvantage. In the case of our own working environment, i.e. German universities, empirical educational research has shown that the system of higher education in Germany has particularly exclusive effects – referring to a variety of discriminations and disadvantages, for example on the basis of class/stratum, immigration, language or religious affiliation.

So what is missing or should be renewed with regard to the current state of research? It is evident that even after years of cultural and social studies research, pressing questions and research findings about everyday racism remain outside the canon of our disciplines and are still underrepresented. Equally, they are still underrepresented in the centre of cultural and social theory. Waverly Duck and Anne Rawls themselves argue that much of the research on everyday racism is still caught up in the old dichotomy of individual versus structure. To put it more succinctly: Much research on everyday racism in their perspective has either examined opinions, attitudes, prejudices, and psychological mindsets on the side of the individual or structures – discourses, laws, constitutions, markets, sciences, and institutions – understood as external factors of influence that often seem out of reach for everyday actors.

In contrast, with their interactionist and ethnomethodological research program focusing on empirical details in micro-situations and their theoretical concept of interactional expectations, Anne Rawls and Waverly Duck have developed interesting tools to overcome this dichotomy. Most commentators confirm and reinforce this argument and see the bringing together of fine-grained qualitative empirical data with a program of analysis that focuses on »racialization in action« (Meyer, in this volume, p. 244) as a particularly innovative and relevant step in their contribution.

Our own impetus for why we curated this debate can be summarized in three points.

First, we wanted to re-examine what Duck and Rawls refer to as »tacit« more explicitly as situated in the current polarized and politicized debates about racism and anti-racism. »Tacit« is translated in German either as *stillschweigend* (which refers to the Latin verb *tacere, schweigen, to keep silent*, as the word root of the term Anne Rawls and Waverly Duck use both in the title the essay published here and in their book) or as *implizit*. We wanted to discuss how implicitly racist expectations embedded in everyday interactions change in the context of an explicit debate about racism. Is this really still about »unconscious« racism, an »interaction order of Race: only subliminally known by Whites? Or can Michael Polanyi's reflections on »tacit knowledge« help us to interpret the orders of racist expectations and embodied everyday knowledge as more active appropriations and more controversial, if implicit, decisions. Polanyi sees tacit knowledge, like every form of knowledge, as including an »appraisal«, a »personal coefficient, which shapes all factual knowledge« (Polanyi 1962:17). One of the strengths of Polanyi's thinking on »tacit knowledge« certainly lies in his rejection of dualistic distinctions between theoretical and practical, objectified and subjective, and between tacit and explicit knowledge. For him, all knowledge practices are »skillful actions« (Polanyi and Prosch 1975: 44). Following Polanyi, we were interested in discussing the proximal notion of »tacit« in the context of racially patterned expectations and to see what can be learned about »tacit« racism as an active blocking of knowledge, as a racist attitude appropriated in the context of socially distributed and widely available alternatives (see Ann Stoler's plea for shifting the discourse about »amnesia« in the context of »unremembered« or »forgotten« colonialism to »aphasia«, a distinctly more salient and complex language disorder to analyse (Stoler 2011; see Beaman in this issue).

Second, we thought it productive to ask how Waverly Duck's and Anne Rawls' research with its focus on the United States would be received and discussed in European contexts and what modifications, extensions, or alternative research designs it might prompt. This question is taken up by our commentators in a variety of ways and it is interesting to read how they address national or supranational differences in the everyday orders of tacit racism. Given the diverse transnational or global interconnections of lifestyles, social movements, political forms, and discourses of all kinds, forms of comparison operating under the assumption that their units of comparison are disconnected and discrete increasingly turn obsolete. Any attempt for comparison or clearly cut juxtapositions seems to be at loss in the face of traveling concepts and entangled lifestyles, the globalization of social movements and the proliferation of international social media and political networks. Movements such as Black Lives Matter translated into different social and national settings and the concepts and forms of political resistance traveling with them have empowered minorities to articulate their anger and their demands. However, how racist interaction orders are globally intertwined and intermingled is usually little addressed (but see Beaman in this issue). This perhaps indicates a research desideratum of its own. The entanglements of orders have long been evident in everyday life; however, empirical studies on such entanglements are, to our knowledge, largely lacking.

Third, and perhaps most crucially, we wanted to explore the scope or extent to which updated ethnomethodological approaches and a practice-theoretical orientation towards everyday forms of »racialization in action« (Meyer, in this volume) might be well equipped to anchor everyday racisms more firmly at the centre of social consciousness. Casting »Race« not as a pre-empirically existing category, but instead making the processes of its production visible in situ

and in process (see Balkenhol and Schramm 2019), as ›Race‹ in practice or interaction, contains a hope. Being identified as practice theorists ourselves, we tend to see value in the description of racist everyday (inter)actions as emergent and in permanent need of doing / undoing. The leeway in »doing racism« (Balkenhol and Schramm 2019) might include active disregard of existing anti-racist or at least less racist alternatives (Meyer, in this volume).

Not all of the esteemed colleagues we invited to this debate shared the concerns that are raised by Rawls and Duck, and some of their scepticism was mirrored by the anger we encountered when we discussed their text in different settings. After all, practice theory is not a theory of action. The »interactional expectations« examined in the text go beyond individual intention. They are so deeply ingrained into social lives and the ways how social worlds are reproduced in ordinary interactions that they are difficult to avoid. Those who belong to the *White* majority may not even recognize racism when it manifests. This kind of tacit racism that readers encounter in the text, is outrageous, it hurts.

But the detailed analyses of racialized interactions in everyday life might also promote an awareness of possibilities for change, or even more: the need for change. In other words: there is potential for enlightenment. Rawls' and Duck's descriptions of micro-interactions, which, of course, are made from a specific positionality indicating different, often antagonistic social positions, intend to amplify societies' potential for making inconspicuous racisms conscious and known, alongside the explicit racist violence that is so visible. If it is true that, with a radicalized theory of practice, the capacity for social reflection is expanded, then there is also hope for change. With their plea for a ›White double consciousness‹ the two authors turn their analysis into a manifesto. Making visible what is hidden enables you to put yourself into the place of the other. What is needed, therefore, is more research

on these mundane interaction orders that constitute everyday life, within and without the universities.

The multi-voiced and lively dialogue that has emerged in the debate that follows is inspiring and provides numerous indications of how the research approach of Anne Rawls and Waverly Duck (which they explicitly reflect as specifically US-American) invites further thinking, indeed: more than we could have hoped for. So, for example, when Jean Beaman points to the analytical potential for theorizing global racisms, which, starting from Du Bois, is already inherent in the observations and indications of Duck and Rawls, but should be explored more systematically and comprehensively in the future. When Martijn de Koning takes up the ball and discusses tacit racism on the basis of his own empirical research on racialization and anti-Muslim racism in the Netherlands (in this volume, p. 234). When Giolo Fele locates the sly and persistent forms of tacit racism (more clearly than Rawls and Duck can address it here themselves) in the context of a specific theory of modernity less based on shared expectations than on conflicting negotiations. When Christian Meyer, in turn, continues to spin this thread and points to the importance of empirical investigations that address precisely not the noiseless consummation, but the ruptures and breaches of racist expectation orders in everyday live. Such research will be able to make visible and delineate alternatives more thoroughly and explore the production of racializing and racist orders of interaction as compromised and/or opportunistic acts of choice. Last but not least, Levent Tezcan, from a German perspective, argues for paying attention to the multiplicity and dynamics of figuration processes in (post)migration societies. In doing so, he is concerned with a recognition of both the malleability and the multiformity of »systemic and tacit« racist interaction. We would like to thank our admired commentators very much for their excellent contributions, all of which open up future research strategies.

The transnational Black Lives Matter Movement (Williams 2015) marks and combats structural racism and institutional discrimination as forms of everyday racisms. Current everyday, ›tacit‹ racism in its many forms has not only been handed down, but is also publicly reinvented and partly re-normalized. The social and cultural sciences are undoubtedly called upon to publicly counter these developments. In our opinion,

this implies an extension of scientific responsibility from texts, ideas, knowledge and research programs to include universities as the institutions we work in as well as the social and political contexts in which we are embedded. We hope that the debate on tacit racism initiated by Waverly Duck and Anne Rawls will have some power to support this.

Tacit Racism is Institutionalized in Interaction in the US: What about Elsewhere?¹

Anne Warfield Rawls and Waverly Duck

We were asked to write a summary of our book *Tacit Racism* (Rawls/Duck 2020) to stimulate discussion of our research approach in Europe. In doing so we confront several challenges. First, a summary leaves out details, which is problematic because our argument rests on detailed analysis of social interaction. Summarizing the relationship between our argument and prior theory and research on Race, including the Black American and minority scholarship from which it takes inspiration, is also complicated.² Our research

is unique. But there are important relationships and we address these below (see also Rawls/Whitehead/Duck 2020). That Europe and the US have different histories of Race and colonization, and that the discussion in Europe is in a ›post-colonial‹ phase, is another challenge. There is no corresponding ›colonial‹ phase of relations between Races in the US. The whole country began as a former colony.³ Black Americans were not colonized by White Americans, nor were they ever ›immigrants‹ in the European sense. The language and literature of post-colonialism do not fit.⁴ Furthermore, the idea of Race is itself problematic. As we discuss it, Race is an American invention, a social construction as W.E.B. Du Bois argued, with no basis in biology. Du Bois also argued that while Race is the most significant category dividing the

1 Die deutsche Übersetzung ist unter <https://doi.org/10.25819/ubsi/10116> frei zugänglich.

The German translation is openly accessible at <https://doi.org/10.25819/ubsi/10116>.

2 We capitalize Race and other exclusionary category terms as a possibly irritating reminder that Race is a social fact and not a biological fact in all our publications. Although the social fact status of Race has been acknowledged since Du Bois introduced the idea – there are still too many who consider Race a natural distinction. From there it is easy talk about how natural it is for people to be afraid of differences. What differences? Our answer is that the differences that scare people – the ones that ›count‹ – are socially constructed differences, not natural differences.

3 In our book we do discuss the possibility that White Americans are suffering from a colonial mentality that dates from the 1600's. But it is quite evident that Black Americans are not.

4 However, recent immigrants to the US from former European colonies in Africa, the Caribbean and elsewhere, have brought the post-colonial mentality to the US, creating problems in the Black American community that we discuss in our book.