



## **Whiteness and Racialization in Colonial Pasts and Presents**

**Summer Symposium**  
*Nordic Summer University (NSU)*  
Rønningen folkehøgskole near Oslo, Norway  
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*Study Circle 5: “Racialization, Whiteness and Politics of Othering in Contemporary Europe”*

### **BOOK OF ABSTRACTS**

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**Cosima Werner**

#### **“SHE AIN’T WHITE, SHE IS FROM GERMANY” – PRAXEOLOGICAL UNDERSTANDING OF WHITENESS**

During my ethnographic research in an African American neighborhood, my interview partner Ben made this statement about me to another African American woman. In the U.S. American context, his observation seems true but is false at the same moment. I am a white scholar but socialized in Germany. My experiences from working with BiPoC in the United States and following contemporary debates in the US-American and German context impact my thoughts on future research on whiteness in Germany. The project is in the developing process.

In the aftermath of George Floyd’s death, the debate on “Black Lives Matter” gained momentum also in Germany. BiPoC demonstrated with white people equality and equity for BiPoC. Although many Germans rejected racism publicly, the notion was omnipresent that Germany’s racism is not as deeply rooted in the social DNA as it is in the USA. US-American discourses on race informed many learnings and arguments on race in Germany but they are not easily transferable to the German context. For instance, who are the “I” (indigenous people) in the German context? Structural racism exists as well and white Germans have privileges accordingly, but this is not commonly reflected. Contemporary debates in German academia focus more and more on whiteness and anti-racism training to increase sensitivity to white people’s privilege in a globally hierarchized society.

The complexity of whiteness in Germany and the uneasiness white Germans feel with it is my motivation to focus more on whiteness in particular to grasp how privileges are inherent to people’s whiteness. In my future research, I want to focus on particular practices that I want to distinguish in practice-arrangement bundles of “making whiteness”, “becoming white” and (subconsciously) “choosing whiteness”. I want to conceptualize these three practice-arrangements bundles with examples from people’s daily life.

I conceptualize whiteness as a socially conspicuous instrument of social distinction that matters in various spheres of daily life. The task of the research project is to understand how whiteness is produced and re-produced in the German context.

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**Linda Lapiņa**

**SWAN-SHAPES OF DENMARK: THE MUTE SWAN AS A FIGURE FOR THEORISING WHITENESS AND COLONIALISM**

This performance paper focuses on the mute swan, Denmark's national bird, as a figure to engage with Denmark's colonial pasts and presents. I juxtapose different articulations of swans in media, popular culture and cityscape of Copenhagen. I trace swans in the fairy tales of the popular Danish author H.C. Andersen, visit swan-shaped paddle-boats on the lakes in central Copenhagen, and examine media coverage of avian flu and episodes of violent swan death. By juxtaposing these different figures, affects and articulations of swans, I aim to tease out how they speak of Danish exceptionalism and whiteness.

**Short bio:** I work as an associate professor of Cultural Encounters at Roskilde University in Denmark. I am also a migrant and a dancer. My research focuses on bodies, affectivity and difference, from an intersectional feminist perspective. I work with affective methodologies, drawing on auto-, multispecies and sensory ethnography, memory work and arts-based methods, including dance, visual methods, performance and poetry. While my research has explored encounters with difference in changing urban spaces and differentiated whiteness in the context of East to West migration in Europe, I am becoming increasingly interested in urban nature-culture entanglements, approached from the perspective of environmental humanities.

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**Teresa Fazan**

**MAKING WHITENESS VISIBLE**

In my research, I am particularly interested in how notion of race participated in the creation of modern and contemporary understanding of the subject. In my PhD project I am looking at the ways of defining subjectivity, humanity and more broadly—understanding of the processes of creating history and knowledge—in Sylvia Wynter's writing.

I am interested in popularising antiracist and decolonial thought in Poland, where it is not particularly widespread. Recently, I have translated Sara Ahmed's "Phenomenology of Whiteness" to Polish as well as one of Denise Ferreira da Silva articles.

Due to my own positionally—I was born and for the most part of my life lived in Poland, i.e. Central Eastern Europe—I am also interested in looking at how coloniality and racialization are present in cultures with no colonial past. This seems particularly important considering recent events on Polish borders, which exposed racist and violent approach of the government and police.

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**Saara Loukola**

**REFLECTIONS ON FINNISH EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION TEACHERS ' UNDERSTANDING AND EXPERIENCES OF RACISM, ANTIRACISM, AND WHITE NORMATIVITY**

In this article, I present my analysis of early childhood education (ECE) teachers ' understanding of racism, antiracism, and white normativity and their experiences of applying an antiracist approach in their work. Previous studies show that the legal obligations regarding children's

rights are not met in Finnish education due to racism and white normativity. In white normativity, whiteness exists as a hegemonic and problematic norm and groups racialised as white hold the position of power in society. To counteract the imbalance of power, the antiracist approach aims to actively resist racism and dismantle white normativity. Qualitative analysis was drawn from six semi-structured interviews with ECE teachers. They described racism in different forms in ECE, such as overt racist acts or speech, indifference, colorblindness, and denial of racism. All six described recognising white normativity and a need for antiracism in ECE. Many considered themselves to be developing antiracists, aiming to adopt an active and reflexive stance against racism. The interviewees describe how they try to commit to forwarding antiracism concretely in their pedagogical choices and by treating all families equally. They emphasised the need for support of the work community and directors in creating an antiracist work culture. However, the entire work community seems to not necessarily be committed to antiracist principles. My study seeks to recognise the current practices and ideas supporting or hindering antiracist acts within education, thus elaborating knowledge on how antiracism is understood and concretised in ECE. It builds on critical theories of race, antiracism, and whiteness in the context of critical education, where education is understood as transmitting and reinforcing hegemonic values. On the other hand, education is approached as a possibility for transformation and social justice. As a white researcher, my main motivation is to contribute to dismantling white normativity, even though my point of view is partial and subject to the whiteness and white supremacy in society. I recognise that living in a society built on racist structures means that everyone shares the responsibility of resisting racism.

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**Milena Blahuta**

### **POLISH MIDLING MIGRANTS IN CENTRAL EASTERN EUROPE: PRIVILEGED OR PERIPHERAL?**

Following the integration with the capitalist center, in the last decades Poland and several other countries of the Central Eastern Europe transformed into an important European sub-centre of immigration from further peripheries of the global economy. Simultaneously, CEE still remains the region of strong emigration towards the Western core of the global economy. Such in-between position creates an interesting duality of adopting the role of the privileged host society in some contexts and remaining the “other Europeans” in other contexts. Due to direct foreign capital investments in Central Eastern Europe, in recent years we can observe the development of a new migration space for a specific type of migration - the mobility of the "global middle class". Migrations to the countries of the "new" European Union are also undertaken by qualified migrants from Poland - despite the fact that they offer less economic profit than in the case of migration to the Western European migration centres. During the symposium I will discuss my ongoing doctoral research in which I analyse the mobility of skilled migrants from Poland to other semi-peripheral migration centres as a strategy to avoid some of the negative aspects of middle-class mobility to the West – such as the problem of Western racialisation of Eastern European migrants as “peripheral white” and the vulnerability to experience devaluation of migrants’ cultural capital caused by the lack of recognition of their skills in the local labour market. I assume that privileged or subordinated status of Polish middle-class migrants is relational, hence, can operate differently in different locations and circumstances. Taking into consideration the unique position of the studied group, which is also reflecting the semi-peripheral position of the studied region in the global structure of dependencies – simultaneously privileged in a global perspective and racialised in the intra-European perspective - I argue that spatial inequalities could offer to Polish middle-class migrants the

ability to afford aspirational lifestyles. By examining the (pre)existing individual interpretative frames of this mobility, I discuss how this mobility relates to understanding the Eastness as a socially constructed category and should it be analysed through the same center- periphery relations of power that have been described in different migratory contexts.

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**Vilius Mačkinis**

### **DEFINING EASTERN EUROPE: CONCEPTUAL REFLECTION OR OTHERING AND STEREOTYPING IN ACADEMIA?**

Following-up on my previous talk at NSU Vilnius symposium in April I want to look into the issue of othering through conceptualisation of Eastern European region. In my previous talk “Where/What/Why is Eastern Europe? In need of the new concepts to define European East” I’ve argued that the current labelling of Eastern Europe associated with (post)communist studies is outdated and still upholds the orientalist Western gaze upon the area. The identification of the region still relies on prevalent narratives of backwardness and cultural otherness, which do not fit the new experiences and present differences between states of the region. Academia as an institution of power lacks a critical assessment of these identification narratives as high-ranking and important academic journals (established in the West) maintain the traditional Cold War division and labels of (post)communism. I want to do a pilot study of the concept and definitions of Eastern Europe exploring these academic knowledge structures in which Eastern European scholars have to participate in order to receive recognition. I want to look into two widely acknowledged scholarly journals - “Post-Soviet Affairs” and “Communist and Post-Communist Studies” - both published and edited by primarily western academic institutions and their representatives, and explore how Eastern Europe is defined in their academic articles. I will look if and how Eastern Europe is defined when the concept is used through the qualitative content analysis of available articles (either open-source or included in University databases) from 2004 till 2021. The exploratory overview of definitions (if any) and categories associated with the region will allow to look into different aspects and countries included in the concept, which in itself will be a start for critical reflection and assessment of perpetuation of stereotyping in academia.

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**Gražina Bielousova**

### **WHITE AT WHAT PRICE? SEARCH FOR EUROPEANNESS AND THE RESURRECTION OF RUSSO-ORIENTALISM IN EASTERN EUROPEAN PUBLIC DISCOURSE**

The proposed project seeks to examine the ways in which Russo-Orientalist rhetorical tropes are reinvigorated, recycled, and repurposed in Eastern European public discourse about Russia’s war against Ukraine. In seeking to condemn Russian brutality and crimes of war, politicians, journalists, and other public figures often resort to discursive formations that either explicitly or implicitly align Russia with Asia and the imagined “Orient” and their savagery, irrationality, cruelty, superficiality, and other forms of excess (Said, 1978). These tropes are commonly invoked when Eastern European countries, especially those most directly affected by war, seek to articulate their own difference and distance from Russia and allegiance to the West. In other words, they seek to divorce themselves from the “East” in their own “Eastern-Europeanness,” and to relocate or remap that “East” to where it “truly” belongs, in Russia. Since

the East in Western European imagination has functioned as an antithesis to all that is truly European (Said, 1878; Lowe, 1992; Anidjar, 2003), such disavowals of the East are also claims to full Europeaness. Animated by the trauma of Soviet occupation and Western rhetorical orientalizing of Russian-annexed or controlled countries, these rhetorical formations betray acute existential anxiety about the continuity and viability of independence and act as an implicit plea for protection in the face of looming threats to national security. At the same time, such discourse reaffirms that “the Orient” is not merely a rhetorical formation but has ontological grounding and can be located; that there is a geographic region to which these tropes of cruelty, irrationality, and excess can be assigned. China, Central Asia, and the Middle East, all of which border with Russia, are seen as proper locations of these attributes, which have in turned contaminated Russia and turned it into Europe’s internal/external Orient (Adamovski, 2006). Thus, it appears that in search of their own whiteness and proper Europeaness (as expressions of full humanity) as well as in distancing themselves from and disavowing Russian values and way of life, Eastern European politicians and public figures participate in re-trenching European colonial tropes into public imagination, and once again, re-Orientalizing Asian countries. These moves gain additional significance when considered against the backdrop of the refugee from Muslim-majority countries crisis at the Eastern European borders. Thus, Eastern European whiteness and racial purity are negotiated at the expense of explicitly articulating and reinforcing colonial racial hierarchies, and are purchased at the price of re-ontologizing the Orient.

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**Irma Budginaitė-Mačkinė**

### **REPRESENTATIONS OF MOBILE LITHUANIAN CITIZENS: INTERSECTING MARKERS OF DIFFERENCE AND VARYING DEGREES OF OTHERING IN THE LITHUANIAN MEDIA**

This paper aims to shed light on the (re)occurring instances of othering of mobile Lithuanian citizens in the Lithuanian media discourse. It draws on the empirical data from the Lithuanian internet media portals (2004-2020) gathered while implementing an ongoing postdoctoral research project.

Country’s accession to the EU in 2004 was accompanied by the metaphor of ‘return to Europe’ in the Lithuanian public discourse (Miniotaitė, 2004). In most of the ‘old’ EU member states this ‘return’ was initially ‘welcomed’ with fears of mass migration and ‘welfare tourism’ with only few opening their labour markets to citizens of the ‘new’ member states. This led to rising emigration rates in the official statistics, accompanied by the depictions of emigration as a powerful tidal force, threatening and difficult to control in the public discourse in Lithuania. Gradually the dominant representations mobile citizens in the Lithuanian media discourse became more diverse, acknowledging the variety of migration trajectories and experiences. Nevertheless, these depictions continued to be hierarchically structured according to the axes of difference based on the level of their socio-economic and cultural capital, their gender as well as choice of the countries of destination.

The sudden restrictions for international travel in 2020 caused by Covid-19 pandemic (as an ‘unsettling event’) drew the attention to mobile Lithuanian citizens in the Lithuanian media. The risks of spread of virus fostered the ‘discourse of fear’. It also contributed to the (re)emergence of the trope of a ‘vile migrant’ echoing the anti-migration discourses of the countries with large Lithuanian migrant population (e.g., UK; Radziwinowiczowna & Galasinska, 2021). This prompts a reflection on the conceptualisation of intra-EU mobility and interlinked depictions of migration experiences in both host countries and countries of origin.

Combining quantitative thematic media content analysis methods with qualitative migration discourse analysis approach, this paper both reveals general thematic trends and sheds light on the continuity and change in meaning attributed to migration from and (temporary) return migration to Lithuania. It illuminates the ongoing processes of othering and explores how various hierarchisations are (re)enacted and shaped by the intersecting markers of difference.

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**Lara Hoffman**

## **THE ROLE OF CULTURAL INSTITUTIONS THE CONTEXT OF MOBILITY AND MIGRATION TO RURAL AREAS OF ICELAND**

During the summer session I wish to present and discuss work-in progress, the project “The role of cultural institutions the context of mobility and migration to rural areas of Iceland”, a collaborative project with Anna Wojtyńska, postdoctoral researcher at the University of Iceland, and Dögg Sigmarsdóttir, Project Manager – Civic Participation at the Reykjavík City Library and several libraries and cultural institutions in different Icelandic towns. The project will be implemented in the second half of 2022 and is funded by the Icelandic Rural research Fund (Byggðarannsóknarsjóður). We investigate the role of cultural institutions in the context of mobility to rural areas in Iceland. Cultural institutions are intertwined and to some extent active agents in mobility to Iceland and urban-rural mobility in Iceland. Especially in rural places, the role of cultural institutions in facilitating encounters between migrants and the receiving society is pertinent because institutions such as libraries are often the main location where informal language and intercultural exchange take place. Public cultural institutions can be seen as “spaces of engagement” (Bradley et al., 2020) that carry the potential of transformative work towards integration, where integration is understood as mutual adjustments. Creative participatory projects have the potential to stimulate social reflection (Leavy, 2015), facilitating social bonding and bridging cohesive behavior between and within different groups (Otte, 2019) and offers opportunities for migrants to claim various forms of official and unofficial belonging (Damery & Mescoli (2019,p1). The project consists of a practical part, events in cultural institutions in rural places, and a research part where we study the outcome of these events and aim to develop a framework for understanding immigrants’ inclusion in and through public spaces. These two areas are inherently intertwined as the events we facilitate are part of a participatory research process following established methods in participatory research which are used especially with minority groups such as in the context of research with indigenous communities (Griffis et al. 2014; Wojtyńska et al. 2022). The aim is to introduce the ideas and the current stage of this project and to critically discuss and reflect on it with other participants at the NSU Summer Session which shares similarities to the "spaces of engagement" we describe in this research project.