

The semantics of tolerance and (anti)racism in Europe:
Public bodies and civil society in comparative perspective.

TOLERACE

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PROJECT'S SUMMARY

Research accomplished between March 2010 and September 2011

The semantics of tolerance and (anti-)racism in Europe: Public bodies and civil society in comparative perspective

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1. Project context, concepts and objectives

The TOLERACE project starts from the hypothesis that **public policies in Europe pertaining to ethnically marked populations fall within a very narrow repertoire: either top-down assimilation or bottom-up assimilation. As such these policies do not sufficiently incorporate anti-racist measures, resulting in precarious modes of ‘integration’ and making social structures vulnerable to racism and racial discrimination.** This research project proposes that at the root of this question is a dominant conception of racism that fails to address its relationship with processes of nation-formation, post-colonial conditions and citizenship in Europe.

Three main ideas define the approach of the project:

- TOLERACE proposes a **contextualised comparative analysis of local/regional cases** in each national context (Portugal, Britain, Denmark, France, Germany, Italy and Spain). This project considers that it is precisely this focus and its relation to European and national levels of policy influence that can bring advances in terms of identifying and, above all, understanding racist structures and practices, as well as concrete proposals in terms of public policies.
- TOLERACE focuses on **the semantics of (anti-)racism** to unravel the commonalities of meaning produced within diverse fields of political discourse and policy intervention, while engaging with the specificities of different European contexts and their historical legacies. It proposes that the common approach to racism as a matter concerning social representations/attitudes (i.e. stereotype, prejudice) is analytically poor, as it privileges an understanding of racism as individual *dispositions* towards difference without ever engaging with the historical and political contexts that have produced such *attitudes*. On the contrary, TOLERACE approaches **racism as related to routine governmentalities** (Hesse, 2004), that is, **to the ways in which power is distributed and populations are administered.**
- This theoretical and analytical position requires **shifting the problem framing** as being related to the characteristics of the ‘groups’ *vulnerable* to racism (i.e. ideas about cultural contrast/incompatibilities, about the salience of ‘colour’) toward a focus on the functioning of specific policies, interventions and projects where public bodies and civil society organisations participate. Knowing and understanding racism cannot be separated from dominant approaches to it. In that sense, the project’s focus on semantics is conceived as a critical study of the ways in which racism is framed and the related policy responses to combat it. The current fields of political discourse (including the academia) and policy intervention on so-called integration, social cohesion and inclusion of ethnic/national minorities and immigrants have been crucial objects to analyse the lasting patterns of racism.

1.1 Main objectives: understanding the renewal of contemporary racism

The main objective of the project is to explore how the different meanings given to racism, anti-racism and tolerance are shaped through the mediation of public bodies and policies at the European, national, regional and local level, as well as civil society organisations. TOLERACE aims at identifying the impact of these meanings on the (re-)definition of European identities within current ‘integration’ policies and post-colonial situations. In particular, the project addresses how the use of categories such as ‘immigrant’ or ‘minority’ shows the tension between assimilation/inclusion-exclusion. They become *gatekeepers* of the presumed

essential unity of *European* national societies by drawing a line between ‘us’ and ‘them’ that denotes and amplifies the assumed *deficiencies* of those ‘others’. These deficits are seen as constitutive of the distance between a national-national from other-nationals or nationals-to-be, reactivating the link between nationality and ‘race’ (i.e. the way of *being* of those ethnically marked). In this process, the characteristics of the ‘true’ nationals’ identity (the unmarked ‘we’) remain invisible whereas the ‘pretended visibility’ of the Other’s identity is constantly emphasised (Balibar, 1991: 60). Under prevailing accounts that eschew relevant historical conditions/legacies, the relation between liberal democracies, the national-state and (post-)colonial conditions is displaced by narratives on the *post-war* immigration (e.g. Britain, France, Germany) or the *new* immigration (e.g. Spain, Denmark, Portugal), reproducing the ‘immigrant imaginary’ (Sayyid, 2004). The ‘new’ or ‘old’ immigrants (calculated by *generations*) are taken as (illegitimately) challenging the national landscape of political belonging.

In order to fully accomplish these objectives this research points at the need to overcome the dominant definition of racism as *attitudes* or *beliefs*. Thus TOLERACE conceives of racism as a product of modernity that it is currently being re-configured through the interrelation of processes, structures and ideologies that activate and reproduce unequal power relations, thus conditioning access to socio-economic, cultural and political resources (i.e. discrimination) by populations ethnically marked as inferior in relation to **ideas and practices of being a European/national citizen**. This condition of inferiority is interpreted as the way of *being* of those marked populations and therefore as somehow ‘inherited’, though it *may be* ‘corrected’ via assimilation/integration. While TOLERACE considers that racism is not an exception of Europe (i.e. it does not only happen in the European *territory* it sees it as rooted in **Eurocentrism**, that is, in a specific theory of history and of human rationality that made possible to talk about *Europe* and *European national-states* as forms of **political belonging**. It is through the contested nature of political belonging (and its *surveillance*) that racism is being reconfigured in current European liberal democracies.

1.2 Research on (anti-)racism in contemporary Europe: *evidence* and policy *advice*

The TOLERACE consortium sees the project’s context and objectives as intimately connected to the nature of the FP7 funding scheme, which stresses a problem-oriented and policy relevant rationale (EC, 2010). Evidence-based policy is described in opposition to *opinion-based* policy, that is in opposition to ‘selective use of evidence, to the untested views of individuals or groups, standpoints, prejudices, or speculative conjecture’ (Davies, 2004: 3). Previous experience and the research carried out so far can provide a sound discussion on these issues, particularly on research on racism and anti-racism.

Three questions are particularly relevant:

- **The production of research evidence on racism:** For the last sixty years, prevailing research evidence rested on *statistical and empirical methodologies* aimed at describing ‘race relations’ (in European contexts and in the colonies), majorities’ attitudes towards minorities/immigrants, or the latter’s experiences of racism and racial discrimination. This kind of evidence too often conflates certain *phenomena* (demographic diversity – i.e. the so-called *presence* of ‘others’) with the sociological problem (the current configurations of racism). TOLERACE thus aims to ‘replace *the problematics of empirical testing of racial*

attitudes and aptitudes with analyses of the body of discourse concerning race and racism' (Goldberg, 1992: xiii). Accordingly, it proposes that the quality of evidence on racism and anti-racist policies does not depend on a positivist confidence on figures (e.g. the statistical significance of the weight of groups 'exposed' to racial/ethnic discrimination), or on supposedly objective clear-cut differentiation between *kinds* of racism affecting different types of populations (e.g. cultural racism affects Muslims, ethnic discrimination affects the Roma, biological/colour-based racism affects black populations or 'Sub-Saharan Africans'). Rather, the quality of evidence on current configurations of racism lies on **a sound understanding of its historical and political foundations**. Only this can allow for the analysis of its long-lasting patterns and for the unravelling of the ill-framing of the problem in dominant academic traditions, political discourses and in the rationale/implementation of public policies that have sustained them. The *validity* of research evidence is related to the representativeness and relevance of the case-studies under analysis (following the extended-case method) regarding the sociological problem identified. Accordingly, **the societal and political problem is the persistence of racism and its renewal; the sociological problem is the configuration of regimes legitimating routine racist practices** while acknowledging the existence of a societal problem (e.g. education inequalities; unemployment; housing exclusion and marginalisation) – seen as informing, but not resulting from, the recurrence of racism and racial discriminations.

- **The nature of academic advice:** three basic types of advice can be distinguished: *counselling* on the *best option* of doing politics/policies; *confirmation* of the already established politics/policies; and *clarification* of the context that harbours certain political options and problem-framing. TOLERACE envisages its commitment to policy-relevant research on the grounds of the third type of advice. The project sees three aspects – with different level of specificity – as deserving clarification: first, the dominant understanding of racism that has informed public policies and the work of monitoring agencies; second, the relation between mainstream framing of integration/inclusion policies and racist practices, structures and discourses; third, the increasing visibility and surveillance of specific populations, such as the Roma or Muslims, and their relation to the re-configuration of exclusionary ideas and practices of European political belonging and citizenship.
- **The relation with policymakers:** it is often assumed that researchers and policymakers live in separate and unintelligible worlds, being the former accused of theoretical abstraction without real(istic) implications, and the latter of bureaucratic routine and biased interests over critical reflection. TOLERACE argues that such borders between the world of policy-makers and academics are much more blurred. To enhance the potential for policy change, academic research and policy makers need to unsettle the two main poles around which policy (and the academic research traditions that informed it) has been organised for the last decades: one pole emphasises a one sided integration in which the 'immigrants' have to adapt/assimilate to the *majoritarian society* vision of itself; the other pole sees relations between ethnically marked minorities and the national majority as articulated, appearing to propose a more dialogic vision of the integration process. The most influential academic account informing policymakers sees racism as a form of ideological falsification or conviction that guides individual attitudes and behaviour – i.e. racism as what happens inside people's heads. TOLERACE aims to critically discuss with policymakers these mainstream ideas through the organisation of participatory workshops, the publishing of policy briefs, and the

participation in auditions at the European Parliament. Throughout the project, TOLERACE is also engaging with a variety of other public constituencies (e.g. activists, practitioners in social organisations, journalists), building interest in the project and reinforcing its usefulness for policy, overcoming the dissemination model in the public engagement of science (Calhoun, 2009: 13).

2. Work accomplished and main results achieved so far

Research carried out **from March 2010 to August 2011** has achieved results related to three core questions:

2.1. Dominant understandings of racism in academic traditions and political debate

TOLERACE started by critically revising the literature to untangle the ways in which different conceptions of 'race', racism and tolerance have been shaped by wider power relations. By focusing on specific historical legacies concerning core narratives on (post-)colonialism and nation-formation, the project has traced the roots of the current understanding of racism as *beliefs* or *attitudes* arising from particular (extremist) ideologies or from (natural) reactions to the *presence* of 'others', dominant since WWII and the revelation of the Holocaust. This now hegemonic conceptualisation has paved way for the increasing marginalisation of anti-racist policies. In order to comprehend this key aspect, TOLERACE carried out discourse analysis of key official documents produced by relevant institutions responsible for the *management* of cultural diversity, operating at national/regional level. Key discourses by politicians and civil servants, as well as public campaigns, were also examined.

Three key ideas regarding our findings are highlighted below:

- **The necessity to disconnect, at least partially, the question of racism from that of contemporary movements of immigration.** The discourse and policy intervention on the accommodation/integration of ethnically marked minorities and immigrants reproduces and renews the assumption that one can clearly distinguish between a unified national society (assumed as ethnically un-marked) on the one hand, and various minority groups (ethnically marked) on the other – and also that the host society *naturally* and *legitimately* cannot accept 'all' immigrants. TOLERACE argues that it is within these dominant discourses and political approaches that racism is being reconfigured in contemporary European contexts.
- TOLERACE draws attention to the fact that political/policy discourses often ascribe the causes of current 'problems of integration' to the immigrants/minorities themselves. Directly or not, **racism is being related to their perceived 'deficiencies' and acquires the status of (natural) reactions to the *different* 'other'**. This kind of **rationalization trivialises racism** and needs to be challenged.
- The analysis of public bodies and policies has shown the **growing marginality of anti-racist measures and approaches within policy making**, a 'vanishing present' that is legitimised – explicitly or implicitly – by a diversity of political rationales: the approach by the *positive side* via 'integration' and 'interculturality' (e.g. Portugal, Andalusia-Spain); the comprehensive human rights approach (e.g. Britain, Basque Country-Spain, France); the discourse on tolerance (and its limits) and freedom of speech (e.g. Denmark, Portugal); an economist

approach regarding the (non-EU) population, which is seen as *immigrant-workers* that have to actively contribute to the national/regional communities (e.g. Denmark, Germany, Andalusia-Spain, Portugal); the use of racism merely within a moralising/patronising discourse (e.g. Italy, Portugal).

In order to fully understand how these traditions (academic and political) are configuring current debates on racism and anti-racism, TOLERACE examined a variety of cases in the **employment** and **education** spheres (see below). The cases were chosen for their quality as '**paradigmatic cases**' (Flyvbjerg, 2004), that is, they are cases that highlight more general characteristics of the societies studied and of the sociological/societal problem in question.

2.2. Racism, anti-racism and the employment life-sphere

TOLERACE carried out the analysis of one/two case studies in each national/regional context, aiming at critically analysing policy developments and responses at local level and their relation to European and national policies and recommendations for the so-called 'inclusion' of immigrants/minorities in the labour market. Engaging with the previous analysis that pointed at discursive re-configurations that make it increasingly difficult to locate racism in Western societies, the cases chosen referred to populations considered as *vulnerable* to racial discrimination or to situations/geographies that had attracted the attention of the media and political discourses (e.g. discourses on the 'unwillingness' to integrate and cultural 'backwardness' of Muslim and Roma populations; the ambivalence of discourse on 'immigration' and 'integration' depending on ideas and processes of (un-)settlement and belonging in the 'host' society).

Two main results can be highlighted:

- **The rationale and implementation of the public policies analysed show a clear process of constructing specific populations and subjects as 'others', focusing on their 'problematic characteristics' and rendering the discussion on racism and anti-racist approaches marginal or even irrelevant.** Policies on 'inclusion' and 'employability' are becoming a question of social assistance, with the agents in charge of their implementation (e.g. local authorities, NGOs, local public servants) seeing their work as aiming at the 'correction' of the perceived *deficits* in the populations' characteristics, culture or values that would constrain their integration in the labour market (i.e. 'backward' cultural practices, 'passivity', 'unrealistic expectations' or 'unwillingness' to integrate).
- **The weakening of anti-racism policies and legislation to protect racialised groups via the tackling of racist structures and practices in recruitment and professional training is replaced by a strong discourse on difference, diversity and identity.** This discourse on difference legitimises the 'unsuccessful' inclusion of immigrants/minorities in the labour market and their 'unfitness' for living among 'us', whereas their 'presence' as guest-workers – anticipated as temporary – is seen as less problematic for not threatening assumed forms of political belonging and the presumed original homogeneity of the 'autochthonous' population.

2.3. Education: debates on difference and ‘integration’

Regarding the life sphere of education, one case study in each national/regional context was carried out, illustrating debates regarding difference and ‘integration’ that have been taking place therein: discriminatory school structures and processes (Basque Country, Britain and Denmark), school segregation (Portugal and Italy), Eurocentrism in curricula and textbooks (France and Portugal), and intercultural education (Andalusia). One of the cases (Germany) also dealt with transitions to work. Research work consisted of the analysis of relevant policy developments (both national and European), as well as a study of responses at local/regional level regarding the framing of racism, through in-depth interviews with relevant mediating agents (teachers, cultural mediators, social workers) and gatekeepers (decision-makers at local, regional and national level).

Three main findings can be highlighted:

- **Racism was not considered a problem to be tackled by schools.** Focusing on questions of culture, rather than relations of power, most mediation agents saw their role as promoting the celebration of cultural diversity. This contributed to the misrecognition of racism, which was seen both in cases of indirect racial discrimination (e.g. in the Basque country, the linguistic model of learning - in Spanish and/or Basque – was leading to the ghettoisation of immigrant and minority children in Spanish only schools), as well as in cases in which it was explicit (e.g. the segregation of Roma pupils along ‘ethnic’ lines in Portugal and in Italy);
- The **framing of the problem** that initiatives examined were meant to tackle **was reproducing the very same racist assumptions that they were meant to challenge.** The semantics of anti-racism and tolerance in education revealed the pathologisation of the populations targeted for intervention (e.g. the Roma, Muslims) and the invisibilisation of the privilege of those ethnically unmarked;
- The absence of a clear meaning of notions that circulate profusely (e.g. intercultural or multicultural education) meant that they become, in practice, normalising categories emphasising the need for peaceful ‘coexistence’, focusing on ‘the positive side’ of ‘other’ cultures, **re-signifying anti-racism as a depoliticised practice that operates by ‘doing good by doing little’** (Kirp, 1979).

3. Expected final results and their potential impact

The challenge that TOLERACE presents is a research that engages with public policy makers as being organised around three themes: the possibility of *phronesis* (Flyvbjerg, 2001) that is, how knowledge is particular and circumstantial; rhetoric – how knowledge is produced in arguments, most obviously in the case of public policy; pragmatism – public policy can be either informed or uninformed but this opposition does not translate into an opposition between theory and practice (Calhoun, 2009: 23-24). Regarding this question, TOLERACE engages with a **contextualised reflexive analysis through the study of paradigmatic cases that reveal a lasting pattern of insufficient problem-framing in public policies and academic debate, pointing to the need of considering the historical legacies that have precluded the tackling of racism as a political phenomenon embedded in the everyday functioning of liberal-democratic institutions.**

TOLERACE sees its potential impact as related to two target audiences: **a) The academy and b) European, National, regional and local stakeholders working in state-endorsed institutions, civil society representatives, anti-racist activists and the media.** TOLERACE aims to challenge mainstream studies on racism focused on majority's attitudes towards minorities/immigrants; it rather proposes an analysis based on the historicity of the concept of 'race' which considers the different temporalities of the (post-)colonial enterprise and engages with the long-term models for the management of diversity and their links to current narratives of nation formation and political belonging. The TOLERACE project is actively engaged in a dialogue with a variety of actors working on the development and implementation of anti-racist and anti-discrimination policies/initiatives. This collaborative work is meant to *clarify* the context that harbours certain political options and problem-framing both to institutions (at European, national and regional levels) and grassroots organisations committed to the prevention and elimination of racism and related discriminations.

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