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NWP #10 | 23 Berlin, June 8, 2023

Research Findings From Short Studies by the National Monitoring of Discrimination and Racism (NaDiRa)

What Might Critical Research on Right-Wing Extremism and Discrimination Look Like?

Reflections on Hegemonic Positionings

Hannah Mietke, Denis van de Wetering, Juliane Sellenriek, Ann-Kathrin Thießen, and Andreas Zick

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INHALT

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ABSTRACT

Research on right-wing extremism and discrimination examines contemporary phenomena manifested on individual, societal, structural, and symbolic-discursive levels. It is essential to recognize and further investigate the fact that scholars cannot observe right-wing extremism and discrimination, along with related phenomena, from a neutral external perspective. Researchers themselves are intersectionally positioned along the axes of difference and are involved in institutions and structures where discrimination is (re)produced. In academic institutions, discriminatory structures become apparent in representational and distributional issues (e. g., in terms of who occupies important positions at the university or who receives research funding), but they also affect the epistemological foundations of knowledge production (e. g., the questions and theories considered relevant, the methods selected, and decisions concerning research practice). In this text, *white* scholars who research right-wing extremism and discrimination reflect on their involvement in power and dominance relations, how this affects their research practices, and where opportunities for concrete critical practice emerge. The text does not provide answers, offering instead an ongoing process of reflection that can continue in research projects and academic networks and, ultimately, enhance academic precision as well.

Keywords: *discrimination; discrimination research; hegemonic; research practice; right-wing extremism; right-wing extremism studies*

ZUSAMMENFASSUNG

Die Rechtsextremismus- und die Diskriminierungsforschung untersuchen aktuelle Phänomene, die sich auf individueller, gesellschaftlicher wie auch struktureller und symbolisch-diskursiver Ebene äußern. Zu beachten sowie genauer zu erforschen ist, dass Wissenschaftler*innen Rechtsextremismus und Diskriminierung sowie damit zusammenhängende Erscheinungen kaum aus einer neutralen Außenperspektive beobachten können. Sie sind selbst entlang der Achsen der Differenz intersektional positioniert sowie in Institutionen und Strukturen eingebunden, in denen Diskriminierung (re-)produziert wird. In wissenschaftlichen Einrichtungen werden diskriminierende Strukturen etwa durch Repräsentationen und Verteilungsfragen evident (z. B. in Bezug darauf, wer Forschungsgelder erhält oder wichtige Positionen an der Hochschule besetzt), sie berühren aber auch die epistemologischen Grundlagen der Wissensproduktion (z. B. die für relevant erachteten Fragestellungen, theoretischen Grundlagen, ausgewählten Methoden und forschungspraktischen Entscheidungen). Im vorliegenden Text reflektieren *weiße* Wissenschaftler*innen der Rechtextremismus- und Diskriminierungsforschung, wie sie in diese Macht- und Dominanzverhältnisse eingebunden sind, welche Auswirkungen das auf ihre Forschungspraxis hat und wo sich Ansatzpunkte für eine konkrete kritische Praxis ergeben. Der Text gibt keine Antworten. Er bietet einen unabgeschlossenen Reflexionsprozess an, der in Forschungsprojekten und Wissenschaftsnetzwerken fortgeführt werden kann, letztendlich auch um wissenschaftliche Präzision zu erhöhen.

Schlagwörter: *Diskriminierung; Diskriminierungsforschung; hegemonial; Forschungspraxis; Rechtsextremismus; Rechtsextremismusforschung*

KEY FINDINGS

- The ambition to conduct research that challenges power structures within a scientific system that is shaped by bias and racism, and to do so from *white* positions, is inherently ambivalent. For example, the critique of *white* dominance in research on right-wing extremism and discrimination can focus on equal opportunities, empowerment, and normalization, but it may also reproduce differences and fail to tackle fundamental discriminatory structures, thus making radical critique more difficult.

- The principle of openness in science should not be limited by political goals. However, research on right-wing extremism and discrimination has social and political effects for which scientists bear responsibility. The trilemma of inclusion (Boger 2017) can serve as a tool to reflect on social and political objectives and help shape research. Where politicizations emerge, they can be addressed. At the very least, research that addresses socially relevant issues requires reflection on its unintended as well as intended effects on others, especially those affected by the research.

- Human-rights-oriented research ethics should protect against discriminatory attributions and practices in research, but this protection can only be effective if reflection is consistently considered as an aspect of the research process from beginning to end. It is necessary to maintain continuity and the institutional incorporation of reflection on hegemonic positionings in the scientific system. Academic networks and knowledge networks can provide spaces for interdisciplinary exchange and debate on these issues.

1. Introduction

Discrimination research[1] examines the causes, extent, and consequences of various forms of discrimination, and how to combat them, from different disciplinary perspectives (Hormel & Scherr 2010: 11). Research on right-wing extremism is similarly diverse,[2] as it also focuses on discriminatory phenomena, particularly extreme right-wing attitudes, ideologies, and behavior, as well as extreme right-wing organizations, propaganda, movements, and how they are embedded in society (Zick & Küpper 2016: 83). Both areas of research[3] address highly political and politicized phenomena, which are manifested not only in derogatory statements and actions in the private and public sphere, but also on an institutional and discursive-symbolic level. Researchers cannot simply observe these phenomena from an external perspective, however, assuming that research is, in and of itself, neutral. All research takes place in a social context that needs to be reflected upon. Researchers should examine the extent to which they themselves are positioned intersectionally along the axes of difference and are involved in institutions and structures in which discrimination is (re)produced.

Discriminatory structures are evident in representational and distributional issues in scientific institutions (e. g., in terms of who occupies important positions at the university or who receives research funding). These structures affect the epistemological foundations of knowledge production (e. g., the questions and theories that are considered relevant, the methods that are selected, and the decisions that are made regarding research practice). As early as the 1980s, feminist critiques of science (e. g., Haraway 1988; Harding 1994) pointed out that existing (supposedly objective) scientific knowledge was produced from certain social positions: "It was […] knowledge made by men for men, having emerged from male perspectives and from the tools and methods used by male actors"[4] (Schmerl 1999: 9). Other critical sciences, such as postcolonial studies, critical migration and racism studies, critical prejudice and conflict studies, cultural studies, and queer studies also criticize academia's claim to universality and neutrality by drawing attention to the continuity of the dominance of *white*[5] perspectives, androcentrism, and heteronormativity, as well as to their essentializing and reifying effects – which, first, is nothing new to researchers concerned with whiteness (cf. e. g., Done & Bonilla-Silva 2013; Garner 2007; Nakayama & Krizek 1995) and, second, does not mean that awareness alone protects against bias.

As *white* researchers in the field of right-wing extremism and discrimination research, we are implicated in the power, exclusion, and dominance relations discussed above, and we also benefit from them to some extent.

This text is the product of a collaborative process in which we reflect on our own involvement in discriminatory power relations and its impact on research. It also identifies specific actionable points for criticism and improvement. We believe this process is essential not only for addressing the impact of power relations on knowledge

1 While discrimination research is not yet an established discipline in German-speaking countries, it can draw from research traditions such as racism research, anti-Semitism research, and gender studies (Scherr, El-Mafaalani, & Yüksel 2017: vii).

2 There is no independent, coherent field of "right-wing extremism studies" in the German-speaking area. In addition to the numerous definitions of the term "right-wing extremism," research critically examines the term itself and questions its analytical potential (Frindte et al. 2016: 34–35).

3 We assume that the considerations presented here may also be applicable to other areas; however, our focus is on research related to right-wing extremism and discrimination, which is linked to research areas exploring phenomena such as right-wing populism, racism, and group-focused enmity.

4 All direct quotations have been translated from German to English by the authors.

5 We view whiteness as a political category and social position that is linked to physical attributes. Depending on specific local manifestations of global racist structures, whiteness also takes on different forms. Furthermore, the term implies that *white* people do not experience discrimination due to racism. We follow the spelling conventions of Eggers et al. (2017), who italicize *"white"* and, in contrast, capitalize "Black" to underscore the constructed nature of these categories and highlight the resistance potential of the category Black and its interconnectedness with political movements.

production but also for countering their reproduction through research and for working towards change, particularly in the community of researchers. Social positionings towards power and dominance structures are complex and, in everyday (scientific) life, various categories of difference or their intersections gain situational relevance. Nevertheless, the present text is primarily intended to question our positioning on racist power structures and to offer reflections on the possibilities and necessities for action.

2. Initial Questions

Critical reflection on the power dynamics in scientific practice has not yet been established in much of the German-speaking research landscape. However, there has been increased discussion about the power effects of research in recent years, for example with regard to considerations of research ethics or the quality criteria of qualitative research (e. g., Kühner et al. 2013; Sylla et al. 2019). There is no unified approach to this issue and it is arguable that there should not be one, given the heterogeneity of scientific contexts. The practice of self-reflection is an important starting point for researchers who wish to question their own research activity. Self-reflection can be considered a "practice of pausing and reorienting" (Brunner 2017: 196), but at the same time could also serve to provide self-affirmation, thereby justifying the maintaining of power. Brunner argues for strengthening the aspect of (hegemonic) self-criticism rather than self-reflection. She considers (hegemonic) self-criticism, with Gabriele Dietze (2008: 40), as a "self-reflection and theorization of hegemonic positions," thus aiming at de-hierarchization. Schweder et al. (2013: 203) also warn against a "fetishization of reflexivity as a status marker." If self-reflection merely serves as self-affirmation and as a justification of one's own approach, there is hardly any potential for a critique of dominance and power. Instead, the primary focus should be questions about the possibilities for change.

The present text aims to provide starting points for a critical reflective practice and for concrete potentials for change in research, based on critical theoretical considerations. Three main questions guide the reflection process: How are our research settings designed or, more precisely, why are our research teams often exclusively *white* and how can we change that? What role does the hegemonic social position, as *white* researchers, play in research practices and scientific findings? What are the (political and social) effects of research on right-wing extremism and discrimination and how can different theoretical approaches contribute to reflection upon them? The goal of addressing these questions is not to generate definitive answers, but to promote debate and to advance the conflict-ridden discussion. The reflective process described in this text is characterized by ambivalences, the resolution of which we do not always consider possible or desirable, since the striving for clear orientations can lead to simplifications and omissions.[6]

2.1 To What Extent Are Universities and Academia *White* Places?

At universities, whiteness usually represents the (often unquestioned and invisible) norm. We operate in "white university landscapes" (Aslan 2017). This means that Black people and People of Color are significantly underrepresented compared to their actual proportion in the overall population (Ahmed et al. 2022: 140–141). This underrepresentation is often associated with negative experiences for those who manage to study, research, and work in higher education spaces despite the barriers they face. For instance, these individuals experience and resist devaluations, microaggressions, invalidation, the de-thematization of racism, epistemic violence, and objectification (Ahmed et al. 2022; Aslan 2017). At Bielefeld University, we have conducted two cross-sectional surveys for the project "Uni ohne Vorurteile" (University Without Prejudice), which clearly demonstrate the extent to which members of underrepresented groups experience unfair treatment due to their affiliation with these groups (see most recently Berghan et al. 2020). Institutional racism that creates exclusions and unequal access to, among other things, university education can lead to *white* dominance in higher education and academia. It is surprising that no major study of institutional racism in higher education has been conducted to date.

[6] We also consider the discussion necessary because an ethical guideline for dealing with misanthropy in research has been lacking or insufficient thus far.

Since the nineteenth century, universities have been producers of the scientific knowledge used to legitimize colonization and violence and thus secure European dominance (Thésée 2006). University structures have been shaped by this colonial past, although this fact has not yet been systematically addressed (Brunner 2020; Mignolo 2019; Roth 2022). In contrast to other institutions and companies that have reassessed their colonial past, German universities seldom do more than address their National Socialist past.

A sensitive and critical question is whether *white* researchers should work on dismantling these structural exclusions from which they benefit. We ought to answer this question unambiguously in the affirmative. But this also requires us to think about the relationship between science and politics and about the risks and exclusions this relationship entails. To what extent science itself is or should be political is a highly contested question (Villa & Speck 2020). Villa and Speck argue for differentiating between science and political practice – that is, making it clear when one is speaking in the mode of science and when in the mode of politics. At the same time, the de-thematization of power structures can be understood as an equally political stance as making them visible in the research context (Dirim et al. 2016). Research fields such as critical racism studies, migration pedagogy, and inclusion studies rightly point to the need to reflect on the close relationship between science and society (Mecheril & Melter 2011; Mecheril et al. 2013). It is precisely because discrimination research uncovers discriminatory structures at universities and in academia that it can be significant for members of universities to become involved in the political processes there – in other words, to shift into the mode of political speaking. This can be all the more successful if expertise in research on racism and discrimination, as well as on right-wing ideologies – which are also shaped by whiteness – can be brought to bear.

Attempts to tackle *white* dominance in the field of right-wing extremism and discrimination research might start with support for anti-racist and decolonial debates and demands at the university, as well as with the university's funding and diversity policies. The first step would be to find out which anti-racist and decolonial networks and organizations are active at the university in question and in the research fields and how they can be supported.

Furthermore, an intensive, continuous dialogue between researchers and funding institutions would be advisable in order to determine where whiteness plays a role and how *white* dominance in research funding can be monitored and reduced in the future. In this regard, academic and knowledge networks, such as the recently formed knowledge networks on right-wing extremism and racism studies funded by the Federal Ministry of Education and Research (BMBF), can provide spaces in which researchers can jointly develop strategies to make the future of German-language research less dominated by *white* voices.

Research funders – at least those that foster independent science – are increasingly paying attention to aspects of equality, diversity, and related factors and applying high ethical standards. Here, it needs to be clarified how sustainable structural solutions can be created that do not lead merely to a focus on participation in the form of diversity policies, which can supplant a genuine critique of power and racism (Boulila 2021). Diversity concepts are now widespread in higher education institutions, but often represent only voluntary and "symbolic commitments that mask the workings of institutional racism and intersectional social inequalities and thus also contribute to their perpetuation" (Thompson & Vorbrugg 2018: 79). Thompson and Vorbrugg illustrate how diversity policies at universities often do not focus on structural and institutionalized inequality, but are performances of diversity that can prevent the dismantling of discriminatory university structures (ibid.: 90). At the same time, they reveal spaces of opportunity that can open up through the appropriation of diversity policies. Following Spivak, Thompson and Vorbrugg present "affirmative sabotage" as an option to use the resources of diversity politics to critique diversity politics, for example, by organizing anti-racist workshops (Thompson & Vorbrugg 2018: 93–94). By participating in committees and working groups on the topic of diversity, researchers of right-wing extremism and discrimination can use opportunities

for “affirmative sabotage” to give more space to marginalized perspectives and demands. These measures can begin to compensate for existing structural disadvantages, to increase the equality of opportunities, to create representations (e. g., role models for students and young researchers), and to help previously marginalized knowledge gain greater recognition.

However, a position as a marginalized speaker does not automatically imply critical research, nor can the extensive effects of racist power and dominance structures be offset by individual equality measures and the mere inclusion of marginalized perspectives. Wiebke Scharathow (2014: 99) points out that it is also a matter of “expanding spaces of discourse and action as well as the change and reestablishment of structures that allow for the presentation of perspectives and bodies of knowledge that are anti-hegemonic and critical of dominance.” In addition, the aim remains to reduce *white* overrepresentation in research on right-wing extremism and discrimination.

2.2 How Can Research Be Conducted From *White* Positions?

The question of how *white* researchers can deal reflexively and responsibly with their own whiteness is closely linked to the preceding discussion. In many fields, such as the history and sociology of science or qualitative research, there is a broad consensus that the social positioning of researchers is of significance for the production of knowledge. However, there is disagreement about what consequences should be drawn from this insight. For example, some approaches that follow standpoint theories, such as the proletarian or feminist standpoint theory, assume that it is only possible to criticize and change power and dominance relations from the standpoint of the oppressed and marginalized “because the rulers are neither interested in nor capable of doing so” (Singer 2010: 295). On the other hand, some argue that this viewpoint essentializes and romanticizes marginalized positions and also that those who occupy privileged positions have a responsibility to use those positions of power to advocate for others (Spivak 2008: 27).

Research on racism, discrimination, and right-wing extremism should raise ethical questions regarding appropriate representations. For example, there is some debate on whether scholars who are not negatively affected by discrimination should research discrimination phenomena at all, and on how to deal with the hierarchical power relations that arise when speaking about individuals and groups who are being discriminated against. Marc Schrödter (2014) and Floris Biskamp (2021) have developed criteria that can be helpful in deciding whether a scientific account is ethically justifiable. In particular, they reflect on the role of the social positioning of the researchers.

In his article “Dürfen Weiße Rassismuskritik betreiben?” (“Are White People Allowed to Criticize Racism?”) Schrödter (2014) discusses this question, which he locates in discourses on racism in science and politics. To approach this statement critically, Schrödter first distinguishes between theoretical-interpretive scientific representations (speaking *about*) and representation in practice and politics (speaking *for*). As far as scientific representations are concerned, it is important to differentiate the kind of racism critique involved, because the significance of the social positioning of the researchers can vary depending on the research question, the object of the research, and the relationship between the researchers and their research partners. The main question is whether the research is analyzing already existing representations, such as racist narratives circulating in the social space or publications by the far right, or whether it is “designed in such a way that it aims to represent the inner and subjective reality of life for the research subjects – the others” (Schrödter 2014: 67). According to Schrödter, the latter requires a much stronger consideration of the researcher’s positioning in the research process, as such research creates new representations and thus risks reproducing power relations, given that it is constructing the group in question itself in the first place. Schrödter mentions the practice of self-positioning as a way of making one’s own subjectivity visible as part of the research process. This practice can be used to document “the extent to which one’s own positional subjectivity plays a constitutive part in the representation of the other and what possible distortions might be

associated with such a representation in concrete terms with regard to the particular research in question" (ibid.: 64). Accordingly, research oriented towards the production of new representations is methodologically justifiable from a hegemonic position, but it requires greater reflexivity. For Schrödter, such self-positioning is the logical consequence of classical epistemologies (ibid.: 69), and the need to address the researcher's positioning seems to be primarily a question of the conditions of knowledge production. In research projects that aim not only to analyze existing representations but also to produce new ones, for example by exploring experiences of discrimination and the associated processes of subjectivation, it may not be enough to consider the conditions of knowledge production only; the ethical conditions of representation must also be taken into account.

Hints as to the nature of these ethical conditions can be found in Biskamp's paper "Gayatri Spivak und der Wille zur Wahrheit: Die aktuellen Debatten um Islam, Patriarchat und Rassismus vor dem Hintergrund von *French Feminism in an International Frame* und *Can the Subaltern Speak?"* ("Gayatri Spivak and the Will to Truth: The Current Debates on Islam, Patriarchy and Racism in the Light of *French Feminism in an International Frame* and *Can the Subaltern Speak?*") (2021). Biskamp analyzes the essays mentioned and extracts the implicit criteria Spivak uses to distinguish whether representations are to be classified as marginalizing or as critical of dominance (Biskamp 2021: 117). According to Biskamp's analyses, the social positioning of the speakers is relevant to the question of appropriate representation, but content-related criteria are more important (ibid.: 118, 133). Spivak does not criticize hegemonic discourses for speaking *about* subaltern groups, but for *how* they do so and for the effect that their speaking has. She problematizes (post-structuralist) views that reject representation altogether when they decenter the subject and attribute an inherent emancipatory potential to the marginalized (Spivak 2008: 27–28). The central criterion for evaluating representations, according to Biskamp, is their political and social effect: Does the representation serve to strengthen hegemonic positions or does it enable an equal exchange and improve the opportunities for action of marginalized groups? Spivak also refers to the actors' motivation: Do they have a real interest in changing power relations? However, both effect and motivation are difficult to observe. Therefore, Spivak looks for clues in the representations to infer motivation and effect. This includes, first, the way in which the "others" and their agency are portrayed: Are they presented as (potentially) capable subjects or as a uniform "mass"? Second, the understanding of culture and dominance must be examined: Does the representation essentialize and homogenize culture or portray it as dynamic and fragile? And third, for Spivak, the examination of one's own involvement in the power and dominance relations portrayed plays a role (Biskamp 2021: 122–124). These criteria take account not only of the epistemological foundations of knowledge production, but also the resulting social responsibility of knowledge producers. The aim of Spivak's critique is thus not research that produces more accurate or more complete representations, but research that undermines mechanisms of dominance (ibid.: 133).

2.3 How Can Theory Contribute to Anti-discriminatory Research?

Criteria for an ethically appropriate scientific representation could focus on the social and political implications and goals of research. For a discussion of those goals, we draw on Boger's (2017) systematization of theories of inclusion.[7]

Boger systematizes theoretical approaches to inclusion (i. e., to non-discrimination or differential justice) that have a critical claim to power and dominance, that conduct research in a non-discriminatory way, and that are "useful for the movements of those affected" (2017: n. p.). Additionally, Boger shows which theoretical approaches meet which political demands of those affected by discrimination

[7] Thanks to Sophia Hohmann for pointing out Boger's trilemma of inclusion in the context of anti-racist research practices and for stimulating discussions on the topic.

and details the links between these approaches. Non-discrimination, according to Boger, can be described as a relationship between empowerment, normalization, and deconstruction. These three points refer to different views on how to design a (research) practice that is fair to differences. For example, research with the goal of empowerment aims to uncover the extent and mechanisms of discrimination and to render the perspectives of those affected visible. The goal of normalization, depending on its relationship to normality, may involve disclosing barriers and critiquing mechanisms of othering or it may involve demanding integration into a normality that is considered superior and desirable. Adopting deconstruction as a goal means, for instance, breaking down the dichotomy of "normal" versus "other" or articulating experiences that are felt but not yet communicable in the available language (ibid.).

The trilemma of non-discriminatory research is that, for logical reasons, an approach can never fulfill all three goals simultaneously. For example, a research practice that aims to promote equality among differences may seek to shape the research process in collaboration with people affected by discrimination, raise awareness of their life situation and everyday experiences, and contribute to improving their circumstances. However, this demand for participatory justice and equal opportunities implicitly affirms what is considered normal, which thus involves invoking those who participate in the research as "others." The trilemma arises because empowering and integrating individuals into "normal" everyday life comes at the expense of othering.

Given this context, the disarticulation of difference and the decentering of the "normal" can appear attractive. This variation of the trilemma draws attention to the discriminating differences that contribute to processes of othering. However, the dissolution of the discursive construction and the associated decentering of normality lead to the disappearance of difference, including the "other" voice. The (de)constructivist aspect of the trilemma depoliticizes the subject and hides its felt experience of disadvantage and discrimination, as well as the power dynamics at play in the exploitation of marginalized bodies under the auspices of capitalist logic. Boger highlights a second form of deconstruction that, in combination with empowerment, becomes emancipatory against the supposed normalism. The assertion of being allowed to be the "other" without conforming to the prevalent norm is central to this approach. Self-empowerment involves narrating one's own story, one's own (felt) experiences, one's own inclusion and one's own self-understanding. From the perspective of deconstruction-empowerment, the structures of scientific knowledge production come into view. It is crucial to create new intellectual spaces that bring to light what is unseen and amplify what is unheard, and to integrate them into the recognized body of knowledge. However, when deconstruction is combined with empowerment, there is a risk of assuming an essential core of the "other." Moreover, the voices of those being empowered may only be heard as opposition or resistance, without necessarily addressing the potential consequences (Boger 2017: n. p.).

These observations highlight the potential for ambivalence to be both productive and limiting, and the importance of addressing it in research that is critical of dominance. It is crucial for privileged researchers to engage with ambivalence in a constructive and equitable manner, or to explore new ways of promoting inclusion and participation in research that navigates the space between empowerment, normalization, and deconstruction.

3. A Reflexive and Critical Research Practice for Research on Right-Wing Extremism and Discrimination Is Possible

The preceding reflections aim to provide useful distinctions for identifying and engaging with one's own research position and practices. They situate *white* dominance (at least) in research on right-wing extremism and discrimination in a context of institutional exclusions and colonial continuities of knowledge production. Critiquing these relations of dominance enables us to shift our focus toward participation and equal opportunities, as well as – to use Boger's terms – empowerment and normalization. Furthermore, the discussion invites us to analyze social positioning and its role in research on right-wing extremism and discrimination. The fundamental challenge in relation to "our own"[8] positioning is not to passively accept whiteness as a norm in the research process, but to consider the specificity of that viewpoint and its implications for knowledge production. However, acknowledging the situatedness of knowledge does not imply that opinions or ways of thinking should be deterministically tied to social standpoints. Hark and Villa (2017: 26) understand positioning "as the recognition that social positions do something to us – and are beyond our control – but that we can also take a stance on these positions." This perspective underscores the responsibilities that emerge from hegemonic positionings. To avoid reducing the critique of dominance to single subject positions rather than structures, it is essential to oscillate between the poles of contentious dialogue and reflective listening / self-reflection (Villa & Speck 2020: 15–16).

This also means acknowledging that science is not the only producer of truth. This realization prompts important questions: Who is heard in the public sphere and how? Which (political) concerns are taken into account? How can marginalized perspectives be given more prominence? These questions also revolve around being situated and cannot be boiled down to a simple either/or choice. Physical and psychological discrimination, which is often *inscribed in the body*, is a prime example of an experience that may resist scientific understanding unless the observer has lived through it themselves. Nonetheless, such experiences are not essentially bound to specific subject positions.

On the other hand, science has access to (temporal) resources, a wealth of knowledge, and experience in reflecting on society. Under these conditions, cooperation between researchers and research partners can be organized in a more productive manner than in other places. This succeeds when, instead of simply making claims that hierarchies and power structures can be abolished through good intentions and participation, one adopts a nuanced approach that acknowledges the complex interplay between normalization, deconstruction, and empowerment (Villa & Speck 2020: 22).

Evaluating the extent to which representations produced in research are socially and ethically appropriate involves a range of criteria that concern, among other things, the effects, goals, and motivation of the researchers. Boger's systematization of the aspirations of inclusion research provides a useful framework for reflecting on the goals and effects that research can and cannot achieve. However, we must also consider the relationship between scientific and political practice. Scientific findings are not always compatible with political interests, and they can sometimes underpin the moral hypergoods of political fields and justify political programs and practices (Unzicker 2012; van de Wetering 2012; Nieswand 2021).[9] Although science and politics are interrelated, they operate under different production and communication logics. Science cannot and should not give up "the precariousness" of its core concepts and limit the openness of its processes (Villa & Speck 2020: 13).

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8 At least this should apply to the authors.

9 Many researchers who have contributed their findings on the manifestations and extent of group-focused enmity to the (local) political discourse can bear witness to this.

Critical research on right-wing extremism and discrimination, like qualitative research more broadly, operates on the principle of openness. This involves allowing oneself to be troubled by the empirical evidence and developing concepts that acknowledge and amplify the voices, experiences, and perspectives of those affected by discrimination. At the same time, it also means becoming aware of one's own privileged positioning and hegemonic academic practice and taking concrete steps to address this reality. Mignolo (2009) terms this process of creating space for other perspectives "epistemic disobedience." This kind of disobedience starts with the emergence of research interests, research questions, and the discourses considered. By recognizing the complexity and ambiguity inherent in scientific inquiry, and by committing to ongoing self-critical reflection, researchers can foster a productively critical and ultimately emancipatory research process.

The distinctions that this text traces draw attention to the inherent ambivalence of research that takes a critical view of power and dominance, and underscore the need for a method of dealing with such contradictions. The process of managing ambivalence extends to every stage of research, including the selection of the research topic, the design of the relationship between theory and empiricism, and the relationships between researchers and their research partners. It also includes considerations of the political necessities, perspectives, and visions to which the research results might point, and how these can be communicated within political discourse.

When researchers who are not directly affected by (racist) discrimination decide upon specific social and socio-political goals for their research, there is a risk of othering. To address this problem, it may be useful to engage in dialogues about the research goals with research partners, funders, and representatives from groups that play a role in the research, both as actors and as research subjects. Forms of participatory research as well as other forms of dialogue can offer approaches. Additionally, joint events or publications that bring together different forms of knowledge from the worlds of science and politics or activism can be valuable. To foster meaningful and equitable collaborations, it is important to plan for fees for research partners as part of the initial grant application.

However, different demands and goals also prevail among research partners. Therefore, research must acknowledge that the reality it observes is usually complex and dynamic, and that decisions must be weighed and reflexively justified in individual cases. Since it is impossible to fully explore in advance the interactions between the object of research, the social positioning of researchers, and the motives and effects of the research, reflection throughout the research process is essential. This reflection can address, question, and document one's subjectivity, biases, and positioning.

These considerations suggest what a framework for reflection, theorizing, and potential change in research on right-wing extremism and discrimination might entail. The framework can be supplemented by further levels of reflection, such as a critique of concrete methods and reflection on research experiences (see, e. g., Lenette 2022; Mackinlay 2019; Smith 2021). The need to continue reflection processes and institutionalize them is important.

Research requires spaces for reflection. The interdisciplinary knowledge networks that have now been initiated by the BMBF and the DeZIM research network will pursue this further. They recognize that the challenges we face are not merely problems with individual research projects but are structurally embedded in the science system and in empirical research itself.

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ABOUT THE PROJECT

The short project presented here provided a space for reflection and discussion before and between empirical research projects in the field of right-wing extremism and discrimination research. It examined the researchers' positioning, goals, and assumptions from a critical perspective. Among other things, we examined the impact of being *white* researchers throughout the research process and ways to reflect systematically on the research's objectives and outcomes. Additionally, a central question focused on identifying specific opportunities for change within the everyday practices of academia.

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More information on the project at:
→ **www.rassismusmonitor.de/kurzstudien/zusammenleben-im-stadtteil**

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