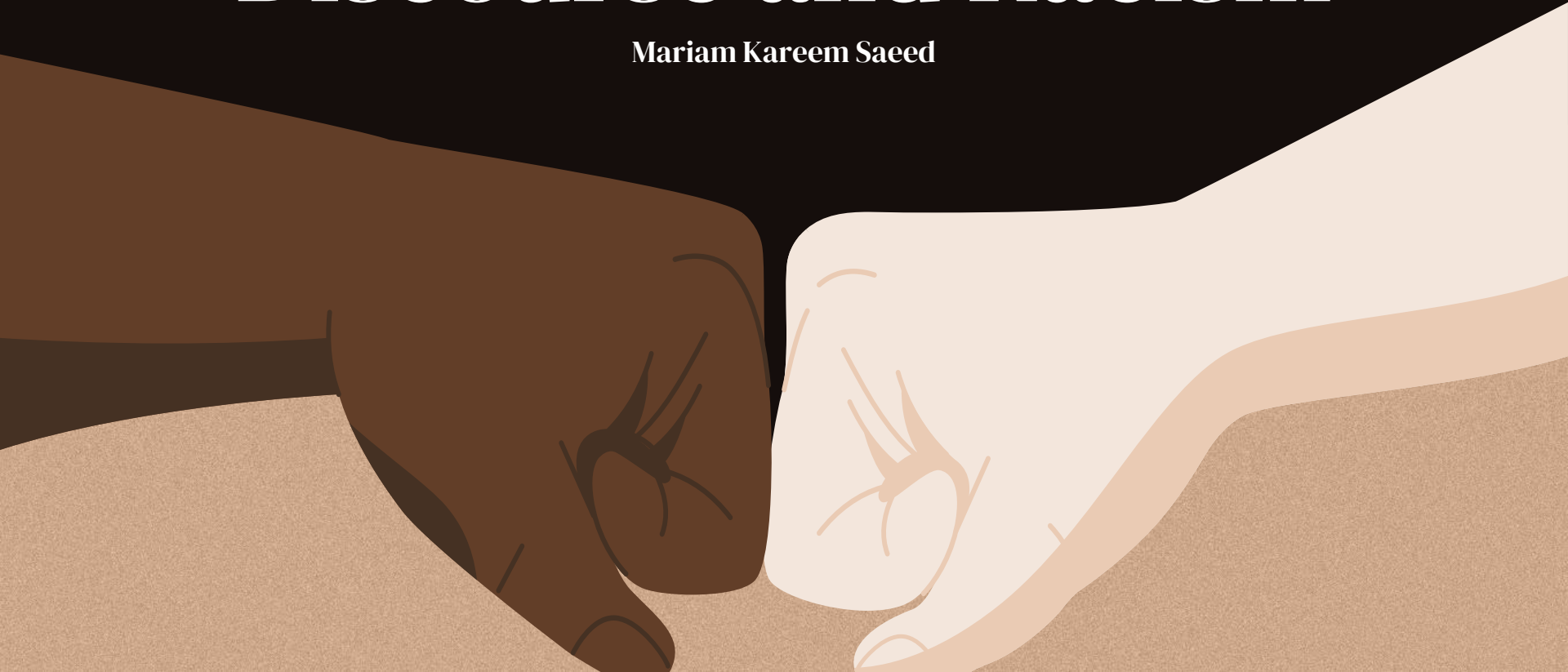


# Discourse and Racism

Mariam Kareem Saeed



# Introduction

- **“Racism”** is a **stigmatizing** headword and **political “fighting word”** that seems to be on almost everyone’s lips today. Perhaps this is because the meaning of **“racism”** has become extraordinarily expanded and evasive.
- There is talk of a **“genetic,” “biological,” “cultural,” “ethnopluralist,” “institutional,”** and **“everyday racism,”** of a “racism at the top,” of an “elite racism,” of a “racism in the midst,” of and “old” and a “new” or “neo-racism,” of a “positive racism,” and of an “inegalitarian” and a “differentialist racism.”

- The starting point of a **discourse analytical approach** to the complex **phenomenon of racism** is to realize that racism, as both social practice and ideology, manifests itself **discursively**.
- ❑ On the one hand, **racist attitudes** and **beliefs** are **produced** and **promoted** **by means of discourse**; discriminatory exclusionary practices are prepared,
- ❑ promulgated, and legitimated **through discourse**.
- ❑ On the other hand, **discourse** serves to **criticize, delegitimize** and **argue against racist** opinions and practices, that is, to pursue **anti-racist** strategies.



## The Concept of “Race”: A Historical-political Etymological Overview

- It is currently an undeniable fact for geneticists and biologists that the concept of “**race**,” in reference to human beings, has nothing to do with **biological reality**.

# From a social functional point of view

- **“Race” is a social construction.**
- **On the one hand**, it has been used as a legitimating ideological tool to **oppress and exploit specific social groups** and **to deny them access** to material, cultural, and political resources, to work, welfare services, housing, and political rights.
- **On the other hand**, these **affected groups** have **adopted** the idea of “race.” They have turned the concept around and used it to **construct an alternative, positive self-identity**; they have also used it as a basis for **political resistance** and to **fight for more political autonomy, independence, and participation.**

# From a linguistic point of view

- The more frequent occurrences beginning in the **sixteenth century**, when the term appeared in **English**. It has, at different times, entered different **semantic fields**, for example:
  1. the field of **ordinal** and **classificational notions** that include such words as "**genus**," "**species**," and "**varietas**";
  2. the field that includes **social and political group** denominations such as "**nation**" and "**Volk**" and, more rarely, "**dynasty**," "**ruling house**," "**generation**," "**class**," and "**family**";
  3. the field that includes notions referring to **language groups** and **language families** such as "**Germanen**" and "**Slavs**"

- The prescientific (up to the eighteenth century) meaning of **"race"** in regard to human beings was mainly associated with **aristocratic descent** and **membership**, to a specific **dynasty** or **ruling house**.
- The term primarily denoted **"nobility"** and **"quality,"** and had no reference to **somatic criteria** yet.
- However, in the **eighteenth and nineteenth centuries** **pseudobiological** and **anthropological systematizations** soon conformed its meaning to overgeneralized, **phenotypic** features designated to categorize people from all continents and countries.
- The idea of **"race"** became closely incorporated into **political-historical** literature and was conceptually transferred to the terminology of **human history**.
- **'Race theorists'** interpreted history as a **"racial struggle"** within which only the **fittest "races"** would have the right to survive.
- They employed the **political catchword** with its vague semantic contours almost synonymously with the words **"nation"** and **"Volk"** for the purposes of their **biopolitical programs** of **"racial cleansing," eugenics, and birth control**.

# How to Explain “Racism

Many **approaches** from different disciplines reflect on the **material, economical, social, political, social psychological, cognitive,** and other causes and motives for **racism**. The explanations offered by each have an important impact on the choice of **specific antiracist strategies**.



## Social cognitive accounts

- Social cognitive accounts focus on **social categorization** and **stereotyping**, relying on the **cognitive concepts** of “**prototypes**,” “**schemas**,” “**stereotypes**,” and “**object classification**.”
- the way **our minds work**, the way **we process information**, may in itself be sufficient to generate a **negative image of a group**.
- Their concepts of **society** and **social environment** are quite **static**, and they assume that **prejudicial apperceptions** and **categorizations** (inherent in all persons) are **inevitable** and **cognitively “useful.”**
- In presuming this, they risk playing down and even – at least implicitly – **justifying racism** as a “**survival strategy**.”
- In addition, they cannot explain why some people are more **susceptible to racist** ideology than others.

# Social identity theory

- It recognizes the importance of **socialization and group experiences** in the **development** and **acquisition** of **social categories**.
- From the perspective of social identity theory, the **social** structures **individual perception, identity, and action**.
- **Individual perception** is formed by patterns **aligned** with **group memberships** and **non memberships**. These learned patterns of perception tend to favor the **in-group** and to derogate the **out-groups**.
- **The image of the in-group** is more differentiated than the images of the out-groups, which, all in all, are much more characterized by **“internal attributions”** than the in group. **Racism and ethnocentrism** are, in large part, seen as the **interpersonal result of group membership** and as the psychological effects of identifying with a specific group in economic and social competition with other groups.

# Psychoanalytical theories

- **psychoanalytical theories** tends to ascribe to all persons the **same dependency** on unconscious **aggressions** and **fixations** which undoubtedly characterize the **inner life** of neurotic and psychotic persons.
- In positing the "**thanatos**," that is to say, innate death instincts, many varieties of psychoanalysis naturalize aggressions against "**the other**" as an anthropological invariant and thus relinquish their political potential to be critical of society.

# Critical theory

- They connect **economic, political** and **cultural structures**, as well as **social dynamics**, with the **character structure** of a person that has been fundamentally formed through **childhood socialization**.
- Thus, **critical theory** does not merely **describe racist**, and especially **antisemitic, prejudice**, but primarily tries to **explain** it in order to illuminate the conditions for the **emergence** and **social maintenance** of **Nazi fascism** and **antisemitism** and in order to help to eradicate **authoritarianism** and **racist prejudice**.

# The colonial paradigm or race relations approach

- This approach views **racism** within the classical Marxist tradition as the **consequence of colonialism** and imperialism in the context of capitalism.
- It analyzes racism in the light of the development of a capitalist world economic system.
- **“Race relations”** is a **“behavior** which develops among people who are aware of each other’s **actual or imputed physical differences”**.
- **“colonial paradigm,”** assuming that **racism** was created to **legitimate colonial exploitation**, externalizes the problem of racism one-sidedly.

# Political economy of migration paradigm

- analyzes the processes of “**racialization**” in the **capitalist centers** in connection with **migration, capital accumulation,** and **class formation**. They focus on **worldwide migration** after 1945 as a consequence of **uneven capitalist development** on a world scale.
- They identify **immigrant workers** “as having a specific **socio-economic function** found in all capitalist societies, namely to fill **undesirable jobs** vacated by the indigenous working class in the course of the periodic reorganization of production.
- This stratum of immigration workers thereby came to constitute a ‘**lower stratum**’ of the working class which was thereby **fragmented**” .

## The postmodern approaches and the cultural studies perspective

- primarily try to analyze the **cultural, ideological, and political** construction of **racism**.
- They emphasize “that **ethnicities, nationalisms, racism** and other forms of collective **identities** are products of a process to be **conceptualized** as a **cultural politics of representation**, one in which narratives, images, musical forms and popular culture more generally have a significant role”

# Racism after race relations paradigm

- he locates the explanation for racism in the “disorganization of capitalism,” strictly speaking in a field of several contradictions “between:
- **on the one hand, universalism and humanism,** and,
- **on the other,** the reproduction of **social inequality and exploitation”**
- **1. The first contradiction** in the conflict between the **universalizing** and **equalizing** tendencies embodied in the “commodification of everything” and the **capitalist necessity** to reproduce social **inequality**.
- Here, **racism** mediates ideologically by attributing specified essential, naturalizing **traits** to social collectivities, thereby **justifying social inequality** and **uneven development**.



- **2. The second contradiction** is that “between the **capitalist universalizing tendencies** and the reality of extensive **cultural diversity** rooted in the disaggregation of social formations.
- Here, **racism** makes it possible to racialize social groups **resisting capitalist** “progress” as **primitive** and **inferior**.
- **3. The third contradiction** is that between the **economic globalization** tendencies and the **nationalization of social formations**, that is to say, the partial confinement of capitalist relations of production within the political form of nation-states wherein **political subjects** are **nationalized** and **racialized**.



## Five Discourse Analytical Approaches to Racism

it is time to turn to the **approaches** through which the **discursive** manifestations of racism have been analyzed.

# 1. Prejudices and stereotypes

- One of the **first discourse analysts** to attempt to study and categorize **prejudiced discourse** was Quasthoff .
- Quasthoff distinguishes between “**attitudes,**” “**convictions,**” and “**prejudices.**”
- **attitudes** is the **affective position** taken towards **a person one relates** to and to whom one can express **dislike** or **sympathy**.
- **Convictions** ascribe **qualities** to others and often provide **rationalizations** for negative attitudes (e.g. *that “blacks smell bad”*).
- **Prejudices** are **mental states** defined (normally) as **negative attitudes** toward social groups with matching **stereotypic convictions** or **beliefs**.

# For the purposes of linguistic access

- Quasthoff defines the term **stereotype** as the **verbal expression** of a **certain conviction** or **belief** directed toward a **social group** or an individual as a member of that social group.
- The **stereotype** is typically an element of **common knowledge**, shared to a high degree in a **particular culture**.
- It takes the **logical form** of a **judgment** that attributes or denies, in an oversimplified and generalizing manner and with an emotionally slanted tendency, particular qualities or behavioral patterns to a certain class of persons.
- **stereotypes** do not exclusively, or even primarily, appear as **warrants**. If they are used to support a claim, they appear usually as a **backing** .
- Moreover, **stereotypes** can themselves be either **data or claims**, supported, in their turn, by other kinds of propositions

## 2. The sociocognitive approach

- According to van Dijk, **prejudice**: is not merely a characteristic of individual beliefs or emotions about social groups, but **a shared form of social representation** in group members, acquired during processes of **socialization** and **transformed** and enacted in social communication and interaction.
- Such ethnic attitudes have social functions, e.g. to protect the interests of the ingroup. Their **cognitive structures** and the **strategies** of their use reflect these **social functions**.

## For the elaboration of a discourse analytical theory about racist discourse

- one of the most valuable contributions of van Dijk's model is the **heuristic assistance** it provides in linking the generation of **prejudice** to **discursive units** larger than the sentence.
- Van Dijk's initial assumption is that those parts of **long-term memory** directly relevant to the production and retention of **ethnic prejudices** (recognition, categorization, and storage of experience) can be divided into **three memory structures: semantic memory, episodic memory, and control system.**

**1. semantic memory** is social memory: it is the **collectively shared beliefs** of a **society** are stored. These beliefs are organized as **attitudes**, which are of a **generalized** and **abstract** nature and are determined by their organization in **socially relevant categories** of the group that is being evaluated (e.g. *national origin* and/or *appearance, socioeconomic status, and sociocultural norms and values*, including *religion and language*).

**2. Episodic memory** retains **personal** or **narrated experiences** and **events** as well as **patterns** abstracted from these **experiences**. The listener constructs a **textual representation** of a story in episodic memory.

- ❖ **General situational models** are the link between narrated events or **personally retained experiences** and the structures of the **semantic memory**.

**3. control system**, is a **personal model** of the **social situation**. The control system's task is to **link communicative aims and interests** (e.g. persuasion) with the situational and individual **social conditions** (e.g. level of education, gender, and relationship to the person one is addressing).

- Van Dijk calls the processes involved in the perception, interpretation, storage, use, or retrieval of ethnic information about minority groups and their actions "**strategies.**"
- The control system **coordinates these various strategies** and at the same time **monitors** the flow of information from long-term memory to short-term memory, as well as the storage or activation of **situation models** in **episodic memory**.



- The interaction of these **three memory systems** thus both **directly** and **indirectly influences the decoding and encoding** – which take place in the **short-term memory** – of the received and/ or self-produced remarks about **minorities**.



### 3. Discourse strands and collective symbols

- **Duisburg group** are probably the most prominent researchers in Germany dealing with issues of **racism and discourse**.
- **The Duisburg group** has been very active not only in its research and documentation of **racism**, but also in proposing strategies **against it**.
- **The main focus** in many of the **Duisburg studies** is **discourse semantics**, and especially the uncovering of “**collective symbols**” that are tied together in “**discourse strands**,” best explained as **thematically interrelated** sequences of homogeneous “**discourse fragments**” which appear on different “**discourse levels**” (i.e. science, politics, media, education, everyday life, business life, and administration).

- **“Collective symbols”** are designated as **“cultural stereotypes”** in the form of **metaphorical** and **synecdochic symbols** that are immediately understood by the members of the **same speech community**.
- Water *“natural disasters* like **“avalanches”** and *“flood disasters,”*
- all persuasively representing *“immigration”* or *“migrants”* as something that has to be *“dammed,”* are examples **of collective symbols**, just as are the *“ship” metaphor*, symbolizing the effects of immigration as on an **“overcrowded boat,”** and the **“house”** and **“door”** metaphor that metaphorizes the **in-groups’ (e.g. “national”).**

## 4.The Loughborough group

- They argue that **attitudes** and **stereotypes** are not simply mediated via **cognition**, but **discourse** is actively **constitutive** of both **social** and **psychological processes**, and thus also of **racist prejudices**.
- **Racism** must be viewed as a series of **ideological effects** with **flexible, fluid,** and **varying contents**.
- **Racist discourses** should therefore be viewed not as **static** and **homogeneous**, but as **dynamic** and **contradictory**. Even the same person can voice contradictory opinions and ideological fragments in the same discursive event.

- like the **Duisburg group** the **Loughborough group** stresses the **context dependence** of racist discourse, draw up a “**racist topography**” by charting themes and ideologies through **exploration** of the **heterogeneous** and layered **texture of racist** practices and representations that make up a part of the **hegemonic taken-for-granted** in this particular society.
- **Similarities** between the **Loughborough** and **Duisburg approaches** go beyond emphasis on **context dependence** and poststructuralist alignment.
- Somewhat similar to the **Duisburg concept** of “**interdiscourse**” (in which the **shared culture** and traditions of a society at a certain time are **sedimented and conceptualized** as systems of **collective symbols**) is the Loughborough concept of “**interpretative repertoire**”.
- However, in its **concrete analyses**, the **Loughborough group** mainly focuses on **narratives and argumentation** and does not pay as much attention to **metaphors or symbols**

## 5. The discourse-historical approach

- One of the most salient **distinguishing features of the discourse-historical approach** in comparison to the four approaches already mentioned is its **endeavor to work interdisciplinarily, multimethodologically**, and on the **basis of a variety of different empirical data** as well as **background information**.
- Depending on the **object of investigation**, it attempts to **transcend the pure linguistic dimension** and to include more or less systematically the **historical, political, sociological**, and/or **psychological dimension** in the analysis and interpretation of a specific discursive occasion.
- the discourse-historical approach perceives both **written and spoken language** as a form of **social practice**

- We assume a **dialectical relationship** between particular **discursive practices** and the specific fields of **action** (including *situations, institutional frames, and social structures*) in which they are embedded:
- we consider **discourses** to be **linguistic social practices** that constitute **nondiscursive** and **discursive social practices** and, at the same time, are being **constituted by them**.
- **“Discourse”** can be understood as a complex bundle of simultaneous and sequential **interrelated linguistic acts** which manifest themselves within and across the social fields of action as thematically interrelated semiotic (oral or written) tokens that belong to specific semiotic types (genres).

- **“Fields of action”** may be understood as segments of the **respective societal “reality”** which contribute to constituting and shaping the **“frame” of discourse**.
- **A “discourse”** about **a specific topic** can find its starting point within one field of action and proceed through another one.
- **Discourses and discourse topics** “spread” to different fields and discourses. They cross between fields, **overlap, refer to each other**, or are in some other way sociofunctionally **linked with each other** (some of these relationships are often described under such labels as **“textual chains,” “intertextuality,” “interdiscursivity,” “orders of discourse,”** and **“hybridity”**



## Discursive practices are socially constitutive in a number of ways:

- **first**, they play a decisive role in the **genesis** and **production** of certain social conditions. This means that **discourses** may serve to construct collective subjects like “**races,**” **nations, ethnicities,** etc.
- **Second**, they might perpetuate, reproduce, or justify a certain social status quo (and “racialized,” “nationalized,” and “ethnicized” identities related to it). **Third**, they are instrumental in **transforming** the status quo (and “racializing concepts,” nationalities, ethnicities related to it).
- **Fourth, discursive practices** may have an effect on the **dismantling** or even **destruction** of the status (and of racist, nationalist, ethnicist concepts related to it).
- According to these general aims one can distinguish between **constructive,**—→ **perpetuating,**—→ **transformational,** and destructive **social macrofunctions of discourses.**

- **Our triangulatory approach is based on a concept of “context” which takes into account:**
  1. **the immediate, language, or text-internal context**, i.e. the “**synsemantic environment** of a single utterance (collocational particularities and connotations, implications, and presuppositions ..etc) and the **local interactive processes of negotiation** and conflict management (including turn-taking, the exchange of speech acts or speech functions..etc)
  2. **The intertextual and interdiscursive** relationship between utterances, texts, genres, and discourses (discourse representation, allusions/evocations, etc.);
  3. **The language-external social/sociological variables and institutional frames of a specific “context of situation”** (the formality of situation, the place, the time ...etc.
  4. **The broader sociopolitical and historical context** that the discursive practices are embedded in and related to, that is to say, the fields of **action and the history** of the discursive event as well as the history to which the **discursive topics** are related.

## Five types of discursive strategies which are all involved in the positive self- and negative other-presentation.

- **First**, there **are referential strategies or nomination strategies** by which one **constructs** and **represents social actors**; *for example*, in-groups and out-groups. Among others, this is done via **membership categorization** devices, including reference by tropes like **biological, naturalizing**, and **depersonalizing metaphors** and **metonymies** as well as by **synecdoches**.
- **Second**, once **constructed** or **identified**, the **social actors** as individuals, group members, or groups are linguistically provided with **predications**. **Predicational strategies** may, for example, be realized as stereotypical, evaluative attributions of **negative and positive traits** in the linguistic form of implicit or explicit predicates.

- **Third**, there are **argumentation strategies** , through which positive and negative attributions are **justified**, through which, for example, the social and political inclusion or exclusion, and the discrimination or preferential treatment, of the respective persons or groups of persons are suggested to be warranted.
- **Fourth**, discourse analysts may focus on the **perspectivation, framing, or discourse representation** by which speakers express **their involvement in discourse** and position their point of view in the report, description, narration, or quotation of discriminatory events.
- **Fifth**, there are **intensifying strategies** on the one hand, and **mitigation strategies** on the other. Both of them help to **qualify and modify** the **epistemic status** of a proposition by intensifying or mitigating the illocutionary force of *racist, antisemitic, nationalist, or ethnicist* utterances.

**Thank you**

