Preface: The intersectional veil of racist invisibility

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One of the most intriguing questions in the social sciences and humanities has to do with the possibility of understanding. How can we truly understand another person? How close can we come to his or her "stream of consciousness", as Alfred Schütz described it almost one century ago?

Representation is of crucial importance for understanding. How we represent others to ourselves greatly influences our ability to understand the intended meaning of their actions. Or what is more: what people *think they have understood* is, in fact, a specific, particular, and, therefore, always incomplete representation. Onur Yamaner shows in his extensive research on female Syrian refugees in Turkey how these interpretations often follow stereotypical lines, producing and justifying hierarchies and social exclusion.

These distorted and demeaning forms of representation can arise from a racist veil of invisibility through which society observes the other, especially the national, ethnic or religious other. However, this racist perception does not treat all possible others equally. Fine, and not so fine, lines of distinction of cultural sub-categories divided by gender, class and other structuring elements create various forms of intersectional discrimination. Disentangling a concrete representation is part of the work of critical social scientists such as Yamaner. To help detect intersectional discrimination, the social sciences and humanities have developed a rich vocabulary on racism, intersectionality and social invisibility.

The research on racism is manifold in its forms, even in terms of the debate on what racism is and how its varieties can be categorized. We are familiar with traditional, "old" and nationalist racism; however, new forms of racism include racism without race, culturalism and cultural racism. More psychological approaches have produced theories on aversive or implicit racism. There are conceptualizations pointing to forms of institutionalized racism and understanding racism as a social structure that can even traverse antiracist identities such as in the notion of colour-blind racism.

Essentially, there is no easy approach to the other or, in other words, there is no truth other than the truth of the question. There is no clear outline of how to approach other groups and individuals; we can only be aware of the difficulties.

Pat Parker impressively captures these difficulties in the first two lines of one of her poems:

For the white person who wants to know how to be my friend The first thing you do is to forget that I'm Black. Second, you must never forget that I'm Black.

Given the variety of approaches to studying racism and in relation to the study presented in this book on racist discourses, it is important to point out the basic semantics of racist speech. There are four basic rules that can be used to identify discriminatory discourses on migrants, ethnic minorities and other groups that are similarly framed. These rules are that these discourses will:

1. Present a clear differentiation between "them" and "us".

Independent of whether the other is seen in ethnic or racial terms and whether people speak of the cultural, national or religious other, all racist speech acts separate between two groups, two ways of life, and two civilizations. The idea of the universal equality of diversity is alien to this kind of semantic. Often, some words are even inclusive, such as "we", "neighbours" or "the people", but they are used in a way that excludes the other from this in-group. The division is always clear, and no real, permanent crossover is possible.

2. Treat "the others" as essentially problematic.

The second rule refers to the treatment of others as problematic for various reasons. Whether they are accused of being dirty or criminal or they are needy and receive a great deal of social aid, in racist discourse, there is always some problem related to "them". This problem is not understood as stemming from social and structural causes that can be modified but as being immanent to these others: they are essentially problematic. In racist discourse, it is not the social conditions that create social problems; it is that other person or group that is seen as the source of problems.

3. Include a critical amount of "them".

The third semantic rule of racist discourse is the perception and description of the number of others as a burdensome amount. There are always too many of "them" among "us". Metaphors of invasion and natural catastrophes reinforce this perception of threat that "they", due to their sheer quantity, may overrun "us" or significantly deteriorate "our" civilization.

4. Present "container images", or imaginaries of society as a closed space.

Finally, racist depictions often treat society as a closed space. Metaphors of society as a house, ship or container convey the idea of society as a limited space where only a certain number of people can live a dignified life.

Thus, when we examine these four semantic rules, we see that it is impossible not to fall into racist and exclusionary discourse independent of words, metaphors, and examples such as those given above. When "they" are different from "us" and when "they" are essentially problematic and existing in a critically limited amount of space, then a conflict between both groups is inevitable due to "their" mere existence in "our" space. There is no pacifist solution in this narrative, only contention, exclusion, deportation and so on. Racist narratives are narratives of essentialist conflicts.

It is important to note here that these semantic rules are part of typical racist semantics and not common to all types of discrimination. Therefore, neither sexist semantics nor modern antisemitic semantics include allusions to a critical number of women or Jews in society. In antisemitism, it is even the small number of Jews and their ability to hide among those in power that is often seen as the danger, rather than their sheer, overwhelming numbers.

However, racism has many different forms depending whether we are speaking, for example, women or men. Racism combines or intersects with sexism and patriarchy in specific ways, as seen in this book. Here, Yamaner describes in great detail how female migrants have to face different forms of discrimination than male migrants and native women.

In this study, where migrants and the host society share the same religion, the racist structure of the discourse is expressed more through the concrete, cultural interpretation of Islam than through dialogue on religious differences as such. Additionally, nationality, ethnic belonging and other cultural factors are included in these racist discourses. They specifically relate to the overall patriarchal structure of the host society.

For example, through Yamaner's very sensitive writing, we can almost "feel" how solidarity between local women and female refugees is possible, although they are prevented by an invisible veil from turning that solidarity into real equality. Here, the clear distinction between "them" and "us" begins to crumble, although it is still clearly observable. On the other hand, we clearly perceive how in the male-dominated press, compared to the male refugee, the female refugee is even the more distant, different and objectified other.

Additionally, the problematic character of refugees seems different depending on whether male or female refugees are the object of discourse. It is well documented that in a wide variety of racist discourses, men are often described as violent or criminal, while women are described as too narrow-minded or as prostitutes. In Yamaner's research, the topic of the husband-hunting woman is discussed several times.

These insights on the importance of perception help us understand that we cannot apply a simple dichotomy of visibility-invisibility when talking about discriminatory discourses. Rather, the question is what kind of visibility is created and how this visibility can be managed. The Syrian refugees in Yamaner's research are highly visible. Whether it is a physical presence in the neighbourhood or a discursive presence in newspapers and on social media, the presence of these refugees cannot be overlooked. However, *they* can be overlooked as

persons. Even if they are clearly present, it is possible to "look through" the people whom society does not consider relevant. Intersectional discrimination seems to create a specific veil hindering the perception the other—a veil that hides important features of personhood, positive traits and endearing characteristics. However, this veil also creates a stereotyped and often demeaning visibility of such people.

Migration research has yielded several strategies for combatting this intersectional veil of (in)visibility. First, there are movements struggling for a direct social visibility, i.e., for a positive image of the most diverse non-hegemonic groups. Further, there are struggles for second-order visibility. With this term, I refer to the social promotions of institutions that can create positive visibility. This would be not a struggle for direct visibility but for creating the structural conditions to overcome the veil of (in)visibilization. Here, struggles about diversity in political representation, the workplace and news media can be named.

Nonetheless, as we have seen, it is not only invisibilization that can be understood as a form of discrimination but also demeaning visibilization. We could even go so far as to describe visibilization as part of a regime of power and control. Often, the visibility of the other is used to perpetuate discrimination. Yamaner writes, for example, about cases of the sexual harassment of those who, due to their wearing of burkas, are identified —i.e., visibilized— as legitimate objects of abuse.

Sometimes, intersectional discrimination can even work in the opposite direction, which is not unexpected. Having multiple non-hegemonic identities does not always lead to more discrimination. We know, for example, that homosexual men are more often victims of homophobic discrimination than lesbians are. As men have higher social visibility than women (which, in principle, is a form of discrimination towards women), this visibility can increase discrimination when used as part of a regime of power and control. In an effort to combat this type of power on control through (demeaning) visibilization, non-hegemonic groups often follow strategies of invisibilization instead of trying to gasin more visibility.

Again, in the research presented in this book, we can see much of this aversion to and mistrust of being seen. Onur Yamaner, as a white, Turkish middle-class man, is well aware of the problems faced when conducting research on this topic. The problems of understanding that I started this short preface by pointing out do more than just affect people's everyday lives. As epistemological reflections, they also inform any research trying to comprehend social realities. When people mistrust researchers due to their everyday experiences with discrimination, research poses severe epistemological challenges. However, ethical problems have to be considered too. In how far does the right to visibilize groups extend for researchers? Or is there perhaps even the obligation to visibilize the studied groups?

What Onur Yamaner does, and what I think critical researchers have not only the right but also the obligation to do, is visibilize the structures of invisibilization; i.e., he points out the structural logics of social discrimination. This turns Yamaner's work into a necessary, critical and courageous study.

For a critical reader of this book, the research presented here not only offers us new insights into the discourse on female Syrian refugees and the situation of these women in Turkey. It also makes us think about the complex process of understanding in general. This is where this study stands out and becomes relevant for other societies with other constellations of intersectional discrimination. Yamaner reminds us that, as researchers, we are never completely able to understand the other; we are never complete insiders, regardless of the topic we are researching. At the same time, social researchers are never complete outsiders either. We are always part of the global village in which we perform our research.

Onur Yamaner perfectly understands the implications of this dialectic of research for his own practice and for the logic of any analysis of the intersectional veil of racist invisibility.