Racial Discourse and Antiracist Purposes – Problems of Critical Whiteness Studies in Germany

Critical Whiteness Studies attempt a critical understanding of whiteness as unmarked yet dominating category within racist discourse, racist institutions as well as racist interactions. In many instances, authors who are engaged in this field of scholarship are convinced that color-blind patterns of argumentation, whether in academic work or in politics, foster racism – and that addressing issues of „race“, especially addressing issues of whiteness, is therefore an appropriate tool of antiracism.

While principally sympathetic with the project of Critical Whiteness Studies, in my talk I nevertheless want to ask how far we can get with it when we want to address problems of racism in contemporary Germany. Who would be considered white there, and who wouldn’t? And what happens when “racial” terminology is critically re-introduced into a context out of which it had been abolished a few decades before in the attempt to critically respond to the atrocities of Nazi racism?