

# Confronting Discrimination

## Phenomenological and Genealogical Perspectives

International Symposium

27 – 29 October, 2021

University of Innsbruck, Department of Philosophy

In cooperation with the Research Platform *Center for Gender Studies  
Innsbruck* (CGI) and the Research Area *Cultural Encounters – Cultural  
Conflicts*

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Forschungsschwerpunkt Kulturelle  
Begegnungen - Kulturelle Konflikte



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## Outlining the agenda

The idea of equal treatment is essential to the self-conception of democratic societies: the rule of law promises protection against arbitrary disadvantages. However, contemporary social reality is still haunted by forms of discrimination. Often, discrimination goes unnoticed, is tacitly tolerated or even endorsed. The violent death of George Floyd and the ensuing global *Black Lives Matter* movement starkly revealed this contradiction, thus raising awareness for the prevalence of racism and racial discrimination, especially in Western societies. Also, the COVID-19 pandemic makes visible a broad array of systematic patterns of discrimination, since the risk of contracting and dying from the SARS CoV-2 virus is by no means evenly distributed. The poor, precariously employed, and minorities are disproportionately affected. In addition, the so-called “risk groups” (such as the elderly) are not only biologically more vulnerable, but become so in interaction with social factors such as poverty, disenfranchisement, marginalization, or dire housing conditions. Hence, susceptibility to the virus is entangled with complex structures and histories of discrimination.

These examples point (1) to the large diversity of experiences of discrimination, from racism, xenophobia, nationalism, and linguicism to sexism, homophobia and transphobia, classism, ableism and ageism; (2) to the ways in which patterns of discrimination are anchored in the very structure of social relations; and (3) to their manifold expressions (othering, bullying, stigmatization, incitement, stereotyping, hate speech, deprivation, exploitation, physical violence, etc.). For several decades, these problems have loomed large in the Humanities and Social Sciences. Authors such as Fanon, Beauvoir, Arendt, Foucault, Goffman, Young, Garland-Thomson, Butler, Spivak, and many others have made significant and lasting contributions to a critical understanding of the processes and dynamics of discrimination and have opened up new fields of study (such as intersectionality theory, standpoint theory, queer theory, critical whiteness studies, or postcolonial theory).

Expanding these critical reflections, this international conference intends to combine the productive potential of *phenomenological* and *genealogical* approaches to current issues of discrimination. Bridging phenomenology and genealogy seems indeed promising, given that an appropriate understanding of discrimination must take into account both concrete experience as well as its structural and historical dimensions. Therefore, bringing phenomenology and genealogy into dialogue will allow for mutual instruction and constructive criticism: while phenomenological analyses run the risk of absolutizing the perspective of experience and affectedness, thereby individualizing discrimination, genealogical analyses are liable to reducing experiences of discrimination to their historical and social conditions. Juxtaposing phenomenology and genealogy may avoid these dangers, thus heralding a more comprehensive understanding of discrimination in its many facets.

## Crucial Questions

Against this backdrop, this international symposium plans to confront experiences and structures of discrimination by taking up phenomenological and genealogical perspectives on these issues in the context of various disciplines and research projects, mainly tackling questions such as:

- What does it mean to experience discrimination and how do these experiences relate to structural discriminatory frameworks?

- How can such experiences become the issue of phenomenological analysis so that they are adequately and sensitively reflected and discussed?
- How can different experiences and structures of discrimination be related or compared genealogically?
- In which ways do multiple experiences of discrimination mutually condition and reinforce each other and how do they become institutionally visible and nameable? How do they become recognizable when they are perhaps not directly evident or witnessed by those affected?
- What role do experiences and structures of discrimination play in the production of academic knowledge and how does this relate to the scientific criteria of impartiality? Who has the role of recognizing an experience as discrimination at all?

## The Symposium as Venue

In the context of the concerns outlined above and in consideration of all those events that demonstrate how discrimination structures social relations and affects the experiences of people, the main ambition of the symposium is to provide a temporary space for scholars and activists to explore, revisit, criticize, and discuss, that is, to confront discrimination – not least by considering what both scholarship and activism may contribute to current disputes and conflicts.

In particular, the symposium invites scholars and activists who are passionate about phenomenological and genealogical approaches and related fields such as Gender Studies and Postcolonial Studies to engage in a common effort to trace some of the past and present features and modalities of discrimination, while being aware of the transformations that are occurring and the ambivalences of the rhetoric or policy of discrimination. In this sense, the symposium strives to provide and assess diverse accounts of discrimination at times that are, apparently, eventful.

The symposium will take place at the University of Innsbruck from 27–29 October, 2021. Invited speakers may present their papers either in English or in German and should submit an abstract of their paper (300 words approx.) by 1 August 2021.

Accommodation and board will be provided. In case the invited speakers have the opportunity to cover their travel expenses, they are cordially invited to do so. For those without access to travel grants, financial assistance may be provided.

Outstanding papers presented at the symposium will be subsequently published in *Le foucauldien*. *Le foucauldien* is an internationally renowned open access journal with high quality standards (peer review) and broad readership: <https://foucauldien.net/>

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