

Nordic Sociological Association Conference 2024

Working group: Media and communication [s38]

“Everything Finnish is now racism”: Contesting antiracism in the Finnish hybrid media ecology

In recent years, there seems to have formed in mediated public discussion in Finland a (limited) consensus that racism is a bad thing. However, this does not equate to antiracism being universally and unequivocally accepted, as different actors mobilize different frames of racism and antiracism that diverge not only on what they consider racism and antiracism to *be*, but also on what should (not) *be done* about them. By frames, I refer to collective action frames (Snow, 2004: 384–385), whereby actors participating in public contention seek to establish and assert their own problem definitions, causal connections, and proposed remedies over those of other actors. The concept of “media ecology” refers to how various media environments shape societies and everyday lives, while hybridity describes “how older and newer media logics [...] blend, overlap, intermesh and coevolve” (Chadwick, 2017: 5).

In my presentation, based on ongoing empirical research on four intensive episodes of contention related to racism and antiracism in Finnish mainstream and social media, I ask: how is antiracism contested in the Finnish hybrid media ecology, and how do media shape contention over (anti)racism? I analyze four controversies and their circulation over the period 2016–2021, a time when public contention related to (anti)racism has been especially visible in Finnish mainstream and social media: discussions on the screening of the 1960 film *Pekka and Pätkä as N*****s* [n-word] on the national broadcasting company *Yle*, discussions on the use of blackface in the traditional *Star Boys* performance, discussions on *the Star of Africa* board game, and discussions on the *Marja Sannikka* show’s episode on “wokeness”.

In addition to examining the different frames of anti-antiracism, I apply Kavada & Poell’s (2021) analytical framework of contentious publicness to examine contention over (anti)racism in the hybrid media ecology through three dimensions: the material dimension to study how

different aspects and infrastructures of the hybrid media ecology afford and hinder rousing and maintaining contention; the spatial dimension to examine the transnationalization of issues and the impact and visibility of social media spaces on mainstream media; and the temporal dimension to analyze the speed and rhythms of contention, and how the differing rhythms and cycles of traditional and social media impact mediated contention. In this presentation, I examine how frames of anti-antiracism are mobilized in contentious episodes to delimit, challenge, and silence different antiracist frames and how both mainstream and social media place boundaries and demands onto how struggles over the meaning of (anti)racism unfold.

References

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- Snow D (2004) Framing Processes, Ideology, and Discursive Fields. In: Snow D, Soule S and Kriesi H (eds) *The Blackwell companion to social movements*. Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishing, pp.380–412.