

CROSSING VISIONARY BOUNDARIES: A TRANSDISCIPLINARY PHOTOVOICE PROJECT OF RACE AND MARKETS

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NOTE: The Flexible Grants for Small Groups application form may have been updated since this proposal was submitted.

Abstract

As a social construct, race is a key site of hierarchy upon which marketplaces rest. A broad cross-section of scholarship demonstrates the role of race and racism in prominent present-day global markets. For example, the banking, textiles, and soft commodities markets are deeply rooted in racially-charged colonial and imperialist practices. Racial dynamics remain central to contemporary marketplace operations across the globe, such as advertising, service delivery, gentrification and consumer profiling.

Despite many insightful scholarly works that investigate race and related topics (diversity, multiculturalism) within marketplaces, extant research has traditionally been conducted in distinct disciplinary fields with little cross-pollination between the social sciences, creative arts, and business worlds. Furthermore, few efforts have been made to compare and contrast the influence of geographical context and disciplinary approaches to understanding "race and markets". Understanding how manifestations of race and racism impact, and have been impacted by, market relations enables scholars and advocates to more effectively address complexities associated with racial privilege, power, and vulnerabilities during a period of global neoliberal market proliferation.

Combining critical race theory and photovoice methodology, this project aims to assemble a cross-national and cross-disciplinary team of scholars interested in race-based marketplace issues and local community stakeholders (community activists, artists, practitioners, policy actors) to discuss, compare and contrast their views on "race and markets". France is the research context as its Republican Model constrains discussions on race and provides a challenging and provocative ethos for such a cross-national dialogue.

The photovoice workshop will take place prior to the 2019 Race In the Marketplace (RIM) Forum in Paris. The team will engage with local stakeholders in critical

conversations about race in France, collect field data concerning “race and markets”, share initial findings during the Forum, and develop a long-term collaboration plan that will yield traditional and creative forms of research dissemination.

The Research Idea *The innovative thesis of the project*

Topics related to “race and markets” have gained considerable momentum across disciplines and contexts worldwide. Yet what “race” and “markets” mean differs widely across disciplines and contexts. Fragmented and siloed research efforts limit our ability to fully apprehend the complexities associated with race-based market inequities. Our project brings together scholars from across the globe from a wide array of disciplines (e.g. sociology, marketing, communication, economics, arts) to discuss, compare and contrast their views on “race and markets”. The collaboration will utilise an innovative mode of inquiry (namely photovoice) to identify and integrate these diverse perspectives and to develop a cross-cultural and cross-disciplinary understanding of “race and markets”.

Photovoice is a community-based participatory research method which involves participants taking pictures of focal topics for group discussion and interpretation. Photovoice draws on a critical approach and as a self-reflexive method, can be an effective way to investigate sensitive social issues. Moreover, photovoice helps uncover the unremarkable and is well suited for the French context where race is a contentious topic of inquiry.

In addition to comparing and contrasting different disciplinary and national understandings of key concepts during the RIM 2019 conference, a 1.5-day photovoice pre-conference workshop will facilitate an immediate collaborative on-site research project. International scholars, in collaboration with local community stakeholders, will engage in critical conversations about racial dynamics in Paris; including by documenting how these are symbolised in aspects of Parisian life. Initiating dialogues on race, in a society where race is a taboo, can illuminate new social research insights.

Background *Current research reference points and their limitations*

Scholarship on Race In the Marketplace (RIM) remains spread out across academic fields. The bulk of the existing research in the marketing field tends to examine a narrow set of topics: target marketing and advertising strategies, discriminatory practices, and issues of public policy and regulation. While such scholarship undoubtedly adds to our

understanding of the relationship between race and markets, it generally lacks a critical approach which explicitly links the reality of power, privilege and oppression to actions for improved social well-being and market equity.

A more nuanced approach can often be found outside of marketing research, including in scholarship stemming from the social sciences, communication, humanities, management, and health sciences. Still very little cross-pollination between disciplines occurs. Plus, a significant portion of “Race and Markets”-related research focuses on the continental US (and more specifically on African-American consumers), and so very little is known on the co-constitutive relationship between race and markets outside the US ethos. Yet, as social constructs what “race” and “markets” mean differ widely across geographic and socio-historical contexts. For instance, in the US understandings of race have historically been linked to phenotype and ancestry, whereas in France presumably more malleable constructs such as “ethnicity” and “religion” function as proxies for “race”—as the term’s usage is widely debated.

The narrow domain and disjointed efforts of prior research create a need for interdisciplinary RIM-related research studies that collectively can advance transdisciplinary insights leading to greater market equality and social well-being.

The Focus *How the research provides a fresh approach to real-life problems*

At a time of neoliberal and neofascist proliferation and normalization, our project provides an innovative way to approach “race and markets”. Indeed, the marketplace, broadly defined as an actual or metaphorical space of exchange (retail, sport, art, housing, healthcare, education), is a key site where bodies, cultures and identities are made visible or invisible.

In France, public discussions on race and markets are considerably constrained due to 1) the historical “Republican” ethos and 2) the more recent acknowledgement of the marketization of everyday practices. As such, there are myriad topics regarding race and markets in France that remain scarcely investigated. The photovoice methodology is a fresh approach that will allow our interdisciplinary team to identify and highlight these dynamics in conjunction with community members and creatives. Through seeing race through the eyes of community members, we link theory with real-life problems (e.g.

art decolonization, gentrification, consumer profiling, advertising stereotyping, commodity racism).

The project's contribution to knowledge includes creative documentation of the nuances of the racial history of Paris and contemporary manifestations of it (Nykiforuk, Vallianatos and Nieuwendyk, 2011). It will contribute to studies of race, the marketplace and public life, through the creation of visual artefacts and fieldnotes which capture associated issues in Paris. This project is guided by the following question: How do issues regarding race manifest in various marketplaces and public spaces in Paris?

These initiatives are in service to the preeminent goal of formalizing a transdisciplinary global research domain whose insights contribute to more racially equitable societies.

Theoretical Novelty *What conceptual innovation the research is aiming at*

This project draws on critical race theory (CRT) for its theoretical framework. Critical race theory posits that white supremacy and racial power are maintained over time (Delgado and Stefancic 2017). In this project we centre our attention on the ways in which markets and consumption practices are built upon and support racial hierarchies (Davis 2018).

Thus, our project intends to improve wellbeing, particularly among racially "vulnerabilized" communities (e.g. refugees, migrants, precarious workers and artists) by transforming existing discourses and practices regarding race and marketplaces. Our project aims to collaboratively formalize a framework that addresses how markets normalize, reify, and (re)produce systemic and institutionalized racism. This can then be used to bring about more equitable local economies and interactions in partnership with community stakeholders. This project provides a chance to create a common and visual language to address real-life problems concerning race, markets and public space in Paris.

Our project will attempt to produce transdisciplinary knowledge through the fostering of interdisciplinary collaboration. Furthermore, our project will integrate international dynamics, specifically the sociopolitical context of Paris, France. Thereby moving away from the U.S. silo which serves as the main context of extant RIM-related research. We expect that initiating dialogues on race, in a society where race is taboo (France), will

illuminate new insights and conceptualization pathways as part of the pursuit of a more equal and just society.

Methodology *How different disciplinary inputs will interact in empirical inquiry – specific methodological examples are often helpful for non-specialist readers*

As a critical research approach, CRT is often enacted in unison with participatory research methodologies. We will draw on photovoice, which provides a process by which people can “identify, represent, and enhance their community through a specific photographic technique” (Wang and Burris 1997, 369). Through the use of photography, photovoice prompts individuals to visually capture representations of their everyday lives. As highlighted by Wang and Burris (1997, 370), the aims of photovoice are threefold:

- (1) to enable people to record and reflect their community’s strengths and concerns,
- (2) to promote critical dialogue and knowledge about important community issues through large and small group discussion of their photographs, and
- (3) to communicate with policy makers

Prior to the photovoice workshop, participants will have an opportunity to get to know one another and learn about photovoice by interacting through a dedicated web portal accessible via the RIM Research Network website. During the workshop participants will receive a half-day tutorial on photovoice best practices and market transformation, followed by a full day of field work wherein cross-functional teams will collect photographic data using techniques learned during the tutorial. Following the “data collection”, the team will integrate and analyze data in collaboration with community members around the mnemonic “SHOWeD”: What do you See here? What is really Happening? How does this relate to Our lives? Why does this problem or strength exist? What can we Do about it? Participants will then present their photographs and freewrites to the group to spark critical dialogue.

Work Plan *How the work will be organised over the award period and what outputs are intended.*

The collaborative process will begin online via the RIM website collaboration portal, which will feature readings and other resources aimed at preparing the research team for effective collaborative work. The photovoice activity will occur in Paris. The design of the project will include a series of activities including a focus group session on

marketplace transformation; written personal reflections (of 500 words); a photography training exercise; photo-story production (see methodology section); and a photography exhibition. A first exhibition will be held during the 2019 RIM research forum. In addition, the team will develop a long-term research collaboration plan that will result in traditional (e.g. journal publications) and creative forms of research dissemination (e.g. online photo exhibition and essay). These include a special issue on race and markets, a consumer conference and sociology conference among other venues to be identified.

The overall timetable of the project is:

- Feb. 15, 2019: Pre-workshop Collaborative Portal Access Begins
- May 19-21, 2019: Online pre-workshop dialogue
- June 24-25, 2019: Photovoice Workshop and Data Collection (Paris, France)
- June 25, 2019: Post-workshop Collaborative Portal Access Begins
- Aug. 1, 2019: Launch of the online photo exhibition and essay
- Sept. 15, 2019: Journal of Marketing Management Submissions Deadline
- November 2019: Southern Sociological Society Annual Meeting Submissions Deadline
- December 2019: Association for Consumer Research Conference Submissions Deadline

Outcome *What further steps and what longer-term outcome are envisaged*

The key long term objective of this project is to further formalize the structure and research agenda of the RIM Research Network. Conceived in 2016, the RIM network has received an overwhelmingly positive response for a new organization in a previously unrecognized space for scholarship and advocacy. In addition to hosting the inaugural bi-annual forum at American University in Washington, DC in 2017, RIM leadership is currently editing a book dedicated to race-related issues in markets, developing special issues for three separate journals (Journal of Marketing Management, Journal of Consumer Affairs, and Dysfunction) focused on RIM topics, and planning the 2019 RIM Forum.

The project supports the creation of novel research and its dissemination in both traditional academic journals and more creative outlets for a fresh take on understanding race and markets. We also aim to coordinate various exhibitions and public displays of the photography that is produced, across different cities. In addition,

digitally archiving the photography produced by this research on an online platform, will broaden its reach and aid the longevity of its impact. Finally, the project will also result in policy recommendations that will positively impact the lives of our community partners. Such policy changes may prove to have merit in other regions and contexts.

Outlets:

- Conference Presentations
- Traditional journal articles – RIM-related special issue at Journal of Marketing Management.
- Community-based material – A global online photo exhibition/essay would allow us to disseminate the research results worldwide across disciplinary and market boundaries.