

Civil society as a catalyst for anti-racism studies and knowledge production in Europe

Hyunjung Lee

Leipzig University, [Asian Voices Europe](#)

*The 23rd IMISCOE Annual Conference:
Strengthening Migration Studies through Community Engagement
Session I: Racism in Europe: cross-national and temporal variations*

June 29, 2026



Research questions

Q:

Under what **epistemic conditions** do variations of racism become **legible as objects of (anti-)racism research**?

A:

- ★ Understanding racism in Europe requires attention; not only to methodological pluralism and comparative scope, but also to the **unequal distribution of epistemic authority**.
- ★ **Civil society** should be understood not as an auxiliary source of testimony or data, but as a **constitutive actor in anti-racist knowledge production**.

The problem is not only empirical; Absence is socially organized

Some forms of racism remain:

- ★ under-theorized
- ★ under-measured
- ★ institutionally weakly recognized
- ★ misclassified by available categories

→ This is **not** merely a **technical problem of missing data**

→ It is also a problem of **how research objects are constituted, and by whom.**
(Trouillot 1995, Bhambra 2014, Goldberg 2002)

Civil society as epistemically generative

Civil society is often epistemically generative in three ways (Fricker 2007, Collins 2000, Santos 2014) :

- ★ **Problem identification**: identifies emergent forms of racism before institutional recognition
- ★ **Evidence production**: produces surveys, reports, testimonies, archives, and documentation
- ★ **Interpretive works**: shapes categories, concepts, and the meaning of findings

Anti-Asian racism as a case of epistemic lag

- ★ In 2022, the European Commission took its first steps in officially **recognizing anti-Asian racism as a standalone hate crime category**, following AVE's lobbying (**European Commission 2022**).



- ★ See **Asian Voices Europe (2024: 56)** for a list of organizations working on AAR.

Anti-Asian racism as a case of epistemic lag

- ★ Anti-Asian racism long occupied an **unstable, invisible position** within European anti-racism scholarship.
- As of now, there is no single EU-wide data on anti-Asian racism
- Only 6 countries in EU adopts anti-Asian racism as a category of racism in their national action plan against racism
- ★ It was often episodically acknowledged, but **weakly** institutionalized as an **object of inquiry**.
- Despite of long history of colonization, anti-Asian racism is often understood as an episode due to Covid-19 pandemic.
- ★ The gap was not simply between reality and research, but between **lived racialization and recognized categories of knowledge**.
- ★ This is where **civil society** becomes **analytically central**.

AVE as an example of epistemic infrastructures

AVE shows how civil society contributes to making racism legible through community-led first EU-wide surveys



(Asian Voices Europe 2024)

- ★ 855 out of 1,275 responses (consented and validated-all reside in Europe)
- ★ data collection: 14. June - 6. August 2021
- ★ via online survey in 10 different languages
- ★ the first Europe-wide survey of AAR
- ★ to identify perception of racism, lived experiences of racial discrimination and impact of the pandemic of Asian living in Europe
- ★ mix-method approach; on-probability convenience sampling/snowballing/double coder strategy

AVE as an example of epistemic infrastructures

AVE shows how civil society contributes to making racism legible through:

- ★ community-led first EU-wide surveys
- ★ advocacy reports to European Commission and engagement with EU anti-racism frameworks
- ★ cross-country documentation
- ★ media interventions

→ AVE did not simply contribute data. It helped constitute anti-Asian racism as a **legitimate field of inquiry**.

Toward a decolonial, co-produced anti-racism scholarship

If racism in Europe is:

- ★ historically specific
- ★ contextually differentiated
- ★ incompletely captured by standard methods

→ (Anti-)racism scholarship must examine not only racism itself, but also [the conditions of its intelligibility](#). (Fine 1994, Smith 2012, Israel et al. 1998)

→ Civil society is not external to anti-racist knowledge production. It is one of its necessary conditions of possibility.

Why community-based participatory research (CBPR) matters

Extractive relation	Co-productive relation
civil society as access point	civil society as an equal partner
communities as respondents	communities as co-definers of the problem
evidence extracted	evidence co-produced
interpretation retained by academia	interpretation shared

(Wallerstein and Duran 2006, Torre et al. 2009, Fine 1994)

Why community-based participatory research (CBPR) matters

- ★ CBPR as a **question of authority**, not only participation
- ★ CBPR is essential not because it simply includes communities, but because it reopens questions of:
 - who defines the research problem
 - who authorizes categories
 - who interprets evidence
 - who benefits from the knowledge produced
- ★ The issue is not participation alone, but the **re-distribution of epistemic authority**. (Mignolo 2011, Smith 2012, Fricker 2007, Go 2020, Santos 2014)

Key Takeaway

- ★ If racism in Europe is multiple and context-specific, then the knowledge through which racism is made visible must also be **examined critically**.
- ★ To study (anti-)racism in Europe adequately, we must expand beyond our methods or our comparative frames. Toward...
 - **our understanding** of expertise
 - **our infrastructures** of knowledge production
 - **our conception** of who counts as a knower
- ★ **Civil society** is not external to anti-racist knowledge production. It is one of its **necessary conditions of adequate anti-racist knowledge production**.

Thank you!

We would like to express our deepest gratitude to all of the respondents for sharing their opinions and experiences with us, to all volunteers for their amazing works and to AVE supports for their support and solidarity.

`hello@asianvoiceseurope.org`

References I

- Asian Voices Europe (2024). When Asian Voices Echo: Anti-Asian Racism in Europe. <https://asianvoiceseurope.org/survey/>. Accessed: 17-02-2024.
- Bhambra, G. K. (2014). *Connected Sociologies*. Bloomsbury Academic, London.
- Collins, P. H. (2000). *Black Feminist Thought: Knowledge, Consciousness, and the Politics of Empowerment*. Routledge, New York, 2 edition.
- European Commission (2022). Common guiding principles for national action plans against racism and racial discrimination. https://commission.europa.eu/document/download/d23174d0-9a1f-46da-992d-a47ccd56391a_en?filename=common_guiding_principles_for_national_action_plans_against_racism_and_racial_discrimination.pdf.
- Fine, M. (1994). *Working the Hyphens: Reinventing Self and Other in Qualitative Research*. Sage, Thousand Oaks, CA. This is commonly cited as a chapter in the first Handbook of Qualitative Research; verify page numbers and chapter formatting for your preferred edition.
- Fricker, M. (2007). *Epistemic Injustice: Power and the Ethics of Knowing*. Oxford University Press, Oxford.
- Go, J. (2020). Race, empire, and epistemic exclusion: Or the structures of sociological thought. *Sociological Theory*, 38(2):79–100. This is the most likely Go 2020 reference fitting the way it was invoked; verify if you intended another Go publication.
- Goldberg, D. T. (2002). *The Racial State*. Blackwell Publishers, Malden, MA.
- Israel, B. A., Schulz, A. J., Parker, E. A., and Becker, A. B. (1998). Review of community-based research: Assessing partnership approaches to improve public health. *Annual Review of Public Health*, 19:173–202.

Refereces II

- Mignolo, W. D. (2011). *The Darker Side of Western Modernity: Global Futures, Decolonial Options*. Duke University Press, Durham, NC. Included because Mignolo was mentioned as a possible decolonial framing reference.
- Santos, B. d. S. (2014). *Epistemologies of the South: Justice Against Epistemicide*. Routledge, Boulder, CO.
- Smith, L. T. (2012). *Decolonizing Methodologies: Research and Indigenous Peoples*. Zed Books, London, 2 edition.
- Torre, M. E., Fine, M., Stoudt, B., and Fox, M. (2009). Critical participatory action research as public science. *New Directions for Child and Adolescent Development*, 2008(123):171–184. Included because Torre et al. were mentioned as possible participatory inquiry references; verify if you want a different Torre/Fine citation.
- Trouillot, M.-R. (1995). *Silencing the Past: Power and the Production of History*. Beacon Press, Boston.
- Wallerstein, N. and Duran, B. (2006). Using community-based participatory research to address health disparities. *Health Promotion Practice*, 7(3):312–323. Included because Wallerstein et al. were mentioned generally in relation to CBPR.