

Call for Workshop Papers & Articles

Mere labels, racial concepts, or scientific methods? The politics, epistemologies and ethics of naming populations in the life sciences and beyond

The life sciences often think of human biological diversity in terms of differences and similarities between populations rather than between individuals. Accordingly, humans are divided into ancestral collectives whose membership is to a large extent unalterable and heritable. This transformation of individuals into populations has far reaching implications. Various studies have argued that positing such populations is hardly distinguishable from assuming the (pre-)existence of human races. Especially studies in medical, forensic and population genetics have caused much debate about how far “genetic ancestry” falls back on racial concepts and how these involve and foster racism (e.g. Burmeister 2021; Fuentes, Bolnick & Watkins, 2019; Gannett 2014; Lewis et al. 2022, Lipphardt 2019; May 2018; M'charek 2022; Novembre 2022). At our workshop we would like to take this discussion further and discuss the role the naming of population plays before, during, and after the research process.

Possible questions include, but are not limited to:

- Under what circumstances are names merely (understood as) convenient labels and when/how do they introduce taken-for-granted epistemologies (assumptions, concepts, and methodologies)?
- Where can we see differences and continuities between historical and present scientific practices regarding the naming and classification of populations? How does changing terms shift the life sciences away from older conceptualizations? How, for instance, do different labels for the same group invoke different scientific meanings and practices?
- How are residual categories or “non-groups” (e.g. admixed populations) defined? How are categorical boundaries drawn and maintained? Race taxonomies, in this case, serve as a prominent, but by no means the only example (Bowker & Star 2000).
- Does a substitution of categories of race by rough geographical, national, linguistic, ethnical and religious descriptions (Panofsky and Bliss 2017; Byeon et al 2021) make a substantial difference in this field, or merely disguise the same problem in a new terminology?
- Is there a beneficial, non-racist use of categories of race in research, e.g. in order to address existing health inequalities (Ioannidis, Powe, Yancy 2021), or should they be avoided altogether?
- How are both scientific and social actors involved in the politics of naming populations? What about their interactions? How do, for instance, the self-understanding and status of social groups affect the scientific use of certain population names, and vice versa (Reardon 2005; Hacking 2007; Bourdieu 2018)?

We welcome contributions that outline the scientific concerns, negotiations and decisions the naming of populations is subject to, as well as the societal repercussion it has. We encourage the submission of papers that address the interrelated issues of politics, epistemologies and ethics in

the use of population labels in life sciences and other disciplines broadly related to the questions and themes highlighted above. Applicants can submit abstracts (300 words) for papers that deal with one or all three aspects (politics, epistemologies, ethics) within the focus of this call. Deadline for abstracts is **6 January 2023**.

We aim for the publication of the papers in an edited STS volume. Therefore, successful applicants should prepare to provide a short paper (3000 words) for discussion by **10th March 2023**. Papers will be shared among all participants before the workshop taking place at the University of Freiburg (Germany) on **30th/31st March 2023**.

Travel costs from European destinations (or similar) and accommodation in Freiburg will be covered for those presenting. If you are intending to participate from further away, please contact us soon and we will explore if we can contribute to your expenses.

Schedule

- Deadline for abstracts: 6 January 2023
- Notification of acceptance/rejection: 15 January 2023
- Deadline for short papers: 10 March 2023
- Workshop in Freiburg: 30/31 March 2023
- Deadline for full papers: July 2023
- Review of full paper: ca. September 2023
- Revised manuscript: ca. December 2023
- Publication: ca. February 2024

The workshop is jointly organized by the Freiburg Network on Ethical, Legal and Social Aspects of Science and Technology (FELSA) and the SoSciBio (Human Diversity in the Life Sciences: Social and Scientific Effects of Biological Differentiations) research group.

Please send your abstracts to

Mihai Surdu mihai.surdu@ucf.uni-freiburg.de

Nils Ellebrecht nils.ellebrecht@soziologie.uni-freiburg.de

Veronika Lipphardt veronika.lipphardt@ucf.uni-freiburg.de

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