

Preface of the editors

Ethnicity as a political resource is a seminal subject in numerous disciplines. Studies on ethnic formations, indigeneity, autochthony, international migration, nationalism, multiculturalism, and racism often approach this topic from a particular disciplinary point of view. However, while much research has been conducted on the formation of ethnicity and its impact on political mobilization in different regions across the globe, the question of whether these political uses of ethnicity are comparable remains unresolved. The same can be said for historical processes of negotiation of collective identities, and the question of whether they should be considered as examples of the use of ethnicity as a political resource. In this regard, the role of both European and non-European forms of colonial expansion is still subject to debate.

The University of Cologne Forum ‘Ethnicity as a Political Resource: Perspectives from Africa, Latin America, Asia, and Europe’ (UoC Forum ‘Ethnicity’) is an interdisciplinary body of researchers promoting inter-institutional and international scientific exchange. Its members are the editors of this volume. They are researchers from the Department of Cultural and Social Anthropology, the Department of Iberian and Latin American History, the Department of African Studies, and the Global South Studies Center within the University of Cologne.

The UoC Forum ‘Ethnicity’ is part of the Institutional Strategy of the University of Cologne within the framework of the German Excellence Initiative. Its objective is to strengthen the interdisciplinary and international dialogue on the formation of ethnic identities and their use as a political resource, applying a diachronic and comparative perspective.

In April 2014, the UoC Forum ‘Ethnicity’ organized an international conference on ‘Conceptualizing Ethnicity as a Political Resource – across Disciplines, Regions, and Periods’. Our aim was to establish a novel base for research on ethnicity – bringing together scholars who might not usually meet to

start a new conversation. This conference was the starting point of our endeavor to bridge the gaps within ethnicity research and to bring together views and perspectives from different fields, research topics, and historical foci. In this conference, we attempted to conceptualize ethnicity as a political resource by addressing it from three interrelated angles: How is it viewed by scholars from different academic disciplines? What forms does it take in various regions of the world? And how can it be investigated with specific reference to distinct historical periods? We invited scholars from diverse scientific backgrounds and global regions to interact in three consecutive roundtable discussions, and to jointly develop a comprehensive approach to ethnicity as a political resource.

The great interest in the conference and its success led us to the idea of a joint publication in order to make our debates accessible to a broader public. We believe this publication makes a substantial contribution towards new approaches in the study of ethnicity, and represents the start of an unprecedented conversation between scholars from different disciplinary, regional, and historical backgrounds.

We thank the institutions who helped us to realize this new and exciting endeavor, the University of Cologne for funding the UoC Forum 'Ethnicity', its activities, and the present volume. We appreciate the inspiring discussions with the participants of the conference that significantly influenced the making of this publication. Our special thanks go to the contributors to this book and to Sofie Steinberger for the coordination and patiently holding all the threads together.

University of Cologne Forum 'Ethnicity as a Political Resource':

Directors:

Michaela Pelican (Department of Cultural and Social Anthropology)

Albert Manke (Department of Iberian and Latin American History)

Members:

Sarah Albiez-Wieck (Department of Iberian and Latin American History)

Anja Becker (Department of Cultural and Social Anthropology)

Mario Krämer (Department of Cultural and Social Anthropology)

Antonio Sáez-Arance (Department of Iberian and Latin American History)

Tobias Schwarz (Global South Studies Center)

Sofie Steinberger (Department of Iberian and Latin American History)

Thomas Widlok (Department of African Studies)