

Exploring the Occurrence and Consequences of Racism/Racial Discrimination in Global Value Chains in the Current International Economy

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This contribution discusses research that aims to understand and assess the occurrence and consequences of racism/racial discrimination in global value chains (GVCs). GVC¹ is a term and concept used to describe the globally fragmented system that operates by outsourcing and offshoring the production of goods and services. GVCs are widespread across many global industries. Many of the consumer goods and services we consume, from electronics to clothing to tourism, are produced in GVCs (Ponte et al. 2019). Outsourcing and offshoring arrangements are led by brand firms or ›lead firms‹, as they are called in the literature. Key drivers and business logics behind GVCs are the minimisation of costs in order to maintain price competitiveness, speediness to market via just-in-time production models, and the continuous offering of new products in increasingly competitive markets. Many lead firms have shed the brick and mortar of running their own factories and hiring their own workers in order to outsource production and labour to lower cost suppliers in lower cost locations, particularly in the Global South. GVC research originated in the early 2000s to understand inter-firm relationships within these globally fragmented arrangements and, more specifically, how lead firms organise supply chains and with what outcomes for their suppliers (Gereffi et al. 2005). A strong focus on economic development outcomes shapes GVC research, particularly on the ›economic upgrading‹ of suppliers (Barrientos et al. 2016).

While GVC research is dominated by its focus on the practices of and outcomes for firms, a parallel albeit less dominant stream of research has been on the impacts and outcomes for workers. Here the concept of ›social upgrading‹ has been developed to assess whether workers' economic and social conditions, including labour

1 Other terms used to denote this phenomenon include global supply chains, global commodity chains, and global production networks. Each one of these terms is situated in a different discipline. While ›global value chains‹ is used in this contribution, the literature review search included the keywords ›global supply chain‹, ›global commodity chain‹, and ›global production network‹.

rights, improve in GVCs (Marslev et al. 2020). The focus on workers reflects the stark negative realities of work in many GVC industries. There are continuously discovered incidences of, as well as alarm over, labour and human rights violations and poor working conditions in outsourced production locations. These include forced labour, factory fires, child labour, chemical poisoning, low pay, lack of social protections, and labour rights, to name a few. These negative outcomes are due to the combined pressures to cut costs and speed up production that are passed on to suppliers and that have, over many years and in many GVC industries, resulted in negative outcomes for workers. Such outcomes are especially pronounced in the Global South, where a significant amount of outsourced production for GVC industries has been relocated. This is because GVC production locations in the Global South tend to have a lack of resources or a weak capacity to enforce labour regulations (Nadvi & Raj-Reichert 2015).

Literature that considers racism/racial discrimination occurs in research on the experiences and outcomes for workers in GVCs. It must be noted, however, that this focus is undoubtedly weak in the GVC literature. It was only in 2011 that GVC researchers first signalled a new trajectory of research with the mention of race as an analytical category. Bair and Werner (2011) called for more research on »disarticulations« by bringing attention to places and actors who have been excluded, expelled, or disconnected from GVCs as a result, for example, of displacement by new players or disinvestment and devaluation. These authors' focus is on labour, namely on how »the availability of labor [sic!] and its differential valuation are inseparable from constructions of social difference based on interlocking and overdetermined hierarchies of race, gender, nation, and class« (Bair & Werner 2011: 991). A few papers from this stream of research are included in this contribution.

The weak consideration of racism/racial discrimination reflects the disciplines in which GVC (and its cognate) research originated and is dominant. They are economic sociology, development studies (with a focus on economic development), and economic geography – disciplines that have largely forgone the consideration of race within their conceptual frameworks. The policy-oriented focus of GVC research on economic development in the Global South has also paid more attention to win-win solutions than to the ills of GVC participation. Hence, it is not surprising that when research has considered racism/racial discrimination analytically it has done so in an inter-disciplinary manner, with connections to critical theories, perspectives and concepts from anthropology, feminist studies, and labour geography, to name a few. Within this smaller body of literature, the concepts and analytical frameworks used are diverse. This reflects the complexities of how we understand and assess racism and racial discrimination. Thus, across the different research works reviewed in this contribution, a variety of concepts are used in discussing the occurrence and consequences of racism/racial discrimination in GVCs.

What tends to be commonly understood and quantitatively measured as racial discrimination in the workplace is a differentiation in employment opportunities, wages, and working conditions. However, as this contribution shows, racially discriminatory practices and more hidden forms of racism are not as easily measured. An understanding of experiences and outcomes that apply to the individual or a small group shows the diverse ways in which racial discrimination occurs and is practiced. To understand these outcomes requires rich and deep analysis. Hence, the research reviewed and presented in this contribution is qualitatively detailed and the narratives presented are specific.²

The next section discusses the various concepts, theories, and empirical foci of racism/racial discrimination used in this review. The remainder of the contribution is divided into six thematic sections on the ›othering‹ and ethnicization of migrant workers, racial discrimination in GVC employment, the role that borders play within GVCs' differentiating and discriminating use of racial identities, the use of racialised imagery and discourses in the marketing of GVC products and services, and the linkages between race and worker power in GVCs. In view of the growing need for public awareness and for legislation that addresses these social ills, the contribution concludes with a call for continued engagement with research on racism/racial discrimination in GVCs, with a set of parameters based on the discussions in this contribution.

A Variety of Conceptual and Empirical Foci

Within its critical fringes, GVC research leans on macro or broader Marxist and postcolonial perspectives to expose persistent, unequal structures and processes of devaluation, which bring the question of race into focus. This is in stark contrast to the predominantly positive, upgrading narratives and analyses in the mainstream GVC literature. A Marxist perspective hinges on the struggle of value and labour value in GVCs. Exploitation in GVCs, through the relocation and outsourcing of work to lower cost locations and lower waged or vulnerable workers, occurs through the differentiation of labour value or the social devaluation of labour, including on the basis of race (McGrath 2018). Indeed, race is one of the ›most explicit and enduring ways of categorising difference‹ (McCarthy et al. 2020). Hence, even or especially in GVCs racial capitalism structures and shapes outcomes through the differential value of labour (McCarthy et al. 2020: 4). Anna Tsing's (2009) conceptualisation of ›supply chain capitalism‹, a framework used by various authors featured

2 Research that included terms such as ›race‹, ›racism‹, or ›discrimination‹ without an analytical explanation of how they have shaped outcomes in GVCs have not been included in this contribution.

in this contribution, focuses on the structuring role of racial and ethnic differences (along with other differentiations such as gender, nationality, religion, and citizenship status) in the mobilisation of capital, labour, and resources. Tsing reminds us that the production of difference is a necessary fuel for the functioning of GVCs. Equally important are the legacies of colonialism, which established »persisting hierarchies« (McGrath 2018: 521) and set the foundations for the differential valuing of labour and labour process within GVCs. A postcolonial perspective reminds us that national development strategies and production locations in the Global South that link up to GVCs occur not as new projects, but as extensions of colonial pasts that are mired in discriminatory racial ideologies, thereby shaping differential outcomes for GVC actors (Werner 2011).

At the meso level of theorisation, the research reviewed for this contribution shows a number of dominant concepts, which reflects the different ways in which racial discrimination, stereotyping, and prejudice occur. Many authors discuss processes of »othering« and »ethnicization« as a form of racism, including through discourse and imagery. Others adopt an intersectional perspective on how race combines with gender and nationality for a particular outcome of discrimination and exploitation. Racial discrimination is also reported in relation to the types of jobs and working conditions that racial and ethnic minorities are placed in. This is explained using a feminist analysis of how constructed categories of social difference, which include race and ethnicity, are reproduced and recombined in ways that diminish the value of or exploit labour relative to capital. This idea of the construction and maintenance of social difference as necessary for capitalist accumulation (see Wright 2006) informs critical research on how firms position themselves in GVCs for profit maximisation (Werner 2011, 2012; Gutelius 2015).

Migrant Workers in GVCs

Empirically, the majority of research reviewed involves case studies on migrant workers. This reflects the fact that in GVCs internal or foreign migrants are a key labour source. They are also the most vulnerable in terms of precarious employment, trafficking, and forced labour (Raj-Reichert 2020; McGrath 2013; Phillips 2011). Their use as subcontracted workers in GVCs, for example their being employed through labour recruitment agencies, has grown over the years as they provide employers with a cheaper alternative to direct employees (Barrientos 2013). Workers who have left home and migrated for work, due to a lack of employment opportunities in their own communities, are some of the most vulnerable workers in GVCs and are ripe for exploitation. They are forced to accept lower paid work and poorer working conditions or become trapped in situations with labour violations. Worker exploitation has a wide spectrum, which ranges from low or unequal pay, benefits, and working

conditions, to forced labour. Because of the widespread use of migrant labour in GVCs, research has informed us of not only the experiences of migrant workers but also the wider structures, including state policies that funnel vulnerable workers into exploitative jobs in GVC factories, farms, fishing boats, and other types of production locations.

›Othering‹ and Ethnicization

In much of the research reviewed, racial discrimination against foreign and domestic migrant workers involved the act of ›othering‹. These processes are used to differentiate the value of workers along racial lines. The process of othering occurred in a variety of ways, as presented by different authors. One example is Krause and Li (2020) who, using ethnographic research, focused on Chinese immigrants working in garment factories in Prato, Italy. Chinese migrant communities developed in Prato as a result of significant shifts within the apparel industry in the region. Prato has been a major production location for Italian textiles for decades. Due to cost pressures during the 1990s, the number of apparel firms reduced dramatically. During this time, in addition to firm closures, outsourcing and offshoring (predominantly to China) increased as apparel GVCs grew and expanded. Interestingly, also during this time there was a reverse inflow of Chinese immigrants to work as cheap labour in the remaining apparel factories in Prato. Over time some Chinese migrant workers established their own firms in Prato and recruited more Chinese migrants to work in their factories. Here we have a case of migrant labour not in offshored locations in the Global South, but in the apparel industry of a location in the Global North as a result of labour migration.

In their case study, Krause and Li engaged in a sociological perspective on the immigrant as being seen as out of place, an outsider, and a threat. The authors explored the experiences of Chinese migrant worker with regard to the feeling of not belonging as a ›double absence‹ in terms of their ›legal status as non-citizens or their social status as ›others‹ (Krause and Li 2020: 5). Another meaning of feeling ›out of place‹ involves the challenges faced in processes of building relationships in host societies. The experiences that Chinese migrants had of being seen as and feeling as ›outsiders‹ in their GVC host locations intersected with their racial identities.

The authors researched racialised stereotypes, which occurred in the figure of the suspect or suspicious ›other‹, that Chinese migrants experienced in their Italian spaces of work and home. Chinese migrants were perceived as ›deviant‹, ›money-obsessed‹, and ›ruthlessly exploitative‹. The ethnographic researchers described everyday forms of racism felt by the Chinese migrants. This included anti-immigrant slogans by right-wing political parties, anti-Chinese discourse in public forums and private conversations, racial tensions between neighbours, and degrading treatment by the police. The authors argued that these experiences likely impacted the

confinement of Chinese migrants to housing in »stigmatised places, like factories and Chinatown« (Krause & Li 2020: 5).

In a similar context, Eriksson et al. (2019) examined the case of foreign migrant workers in the Swedish wild-berry GVC. Swedish berries are exported for medicinal purposes to countries like China (while most berries consumed in Sweden are imported) and berry-picking has become increasingly dependent on migrant workers from Thailand (see also Eriksson and Tollefsen 2015; Hedberg 2016; Tollefsen et al. 2020). The authors showed how customers differentiated migrant worker berry-pickers by imagining that these workers had different needs and priorities than the Swedish did. The authors showed how Thai berry pickers are represented as racialised outsiders or »others« by analysing the comparison that was made between these workers and Swedishness, or how things »used to be done« in the past (Eriksson et al. 2019: 44). Perceptions of »who the workers are« were important for how workers were treated and whether they were perceived as persons with agency. The situation of Thai migrant workers, who laboured in harsh conditions with long hours and low pay, including scandals of unpaid wages, was seen by some consumers as acceptable due to nationality and even »body type« of Thai workers. Other customers blamed Thai workers themselves for being »misinformed, dishonest and underserving« and depicted them as invaders of Swedish forests (Eriksson et al. 2019: 50).

The authors' findings point to how the production of representations of certain types of workers with specific identities and differences was important for making possible and continuing the exploitation of migrant workers (Eriksson et al. 2019: 44). The production of »others« with regard to foreign migrant workers serves to marginalise and subordinate them to unequal working conditions and even unequal labour rights in a GVC production location. The »othering« of Thai workers worked to remove from customers the moral compulsion of responsibility for the plight of the migrant workers and to disconnect these workers from the protections that they deserved under Swedish laws and regulations. Their social construction of these workers as different based on race and nationality not only resulted in their poor working conditions but also led to difficulties in safeguarding their labour rights and exercise of worker power.

While Krause and Li (2020) and Eriksson et al. (2019) discussed »othering« based on cultural prejudices about migrant workers as non-citizens, Zhang (2013) shows how »othering« occurs through the »ethnicization« of migrant workers based on specific ethnic identities. In a case study of migrant workers in the Tibetan carpet GVC, the author used postcolonial theory about the ethnicization of labour, along with feminist literature, to understand ethnicised subjects as a form of labour commodification. The production of ethnic subjects is a form of racism that classifies certain groups as »ethnics« in order to subordinate them to lower positions in the workplace (see Chow 2002).

Focusing on the production of Tibetan carpets in China, Zhang (2013) points to the creation of ethnic subjects and an ›ethnic culture‹ of women from Tibet's rural areas working in the city of Lhasa in order to drive a specific form of labour commodity. This case study is situated in China, where different ethnic groups were officially classified in a hierarchical manner (one dominant group and 55 minority groups) by the government during the 1950s. This produced cultural differentiation in Chinese society. It is with regard to this cultural context that Zhang (2013) considers whether the internal migration of Tibetan workers, who worked for the Tibetan carpet industry GVC and were identified as ›ethnic minorities‹ in China, exacerbated negative outcomes that result from being perceived as the ›other‹ or an ›ethnicized subject,‹ such as discrimination and marginalisation. These ›ethnicised‹ workers also take on work that perpetuates their position as an ›outsider, ethnic‹ (Zhang 2013: 756). The ›ethnicization‹ of their work in the industry also leads to their marginalisation outside the carpet factories. Zhang (2013) argued that placing workers in lower rungs of a racial hierarchy, which increases their vulnerability for exploitation as low-level workers, was essential for the functioning of the Tibetan carpet GVC.

From a discursive perspective, Terry (2014) examined racial discrimination in the employment positions of Filipino workers in the cruise industry GVC. This discrimination was based on discourse that perpetuated stereotypes, which placed these workers at the bottom of an ethnically segmented workforce. Terry reminds us that discourse is linked to materiality because it is a type of knowledge that shapes our ideas and the way we act (Rose 2001). Foreign migrant workers are subject to a contradictory discourse: they are essential for production and economic output as inexpensive and flexible workers yet they are seen as outsiders and threats to their host communities. Host communities also justify migrant workers' low wages or difficult working conditions by claiming these amount to an improvement on their harsher conditions back in their home countries.

Further, dominant discourses depend on powerful social institutions, such as state agencies, which define and claim particular types of knowledge to be true. Terry (2014), in presenting empirically how Filipino workers are thought about by their foreign employers and customers who receive their services, points to the role of state institutions in the Philippines that, as a means of regulating migration, help perpetuate a racialised discourse of Filipino workers as ideal. This ideal includes being docile and low-cost for the global economy. This is seen, for example, in marketing brochures that describe Filipino workers. Here, Terry (2014) points to state-sponsored racialised discourse about workers for exploitation in GVCs, which spills into how recruitment agencies portray these workers.

A particular discourse was used to differentiate who appeared to be skilled and unskilled along racial lines and nationality. The perpetuated discourse about Filipino workers as hardworking and flexible or adaptable to other cultures was also contrasted with, and thereby created competition with, other nationalities. There is a

›persistent stereotype‹ that certain shipboard positions are filled by Filipino workers who are imagined and discursively represented as docile, compliant, industrious and inexpensive. Such discourse relates to the workplace positioning of Filipino seafarers and reinforces reading of »Filipino-ness‹ that marks them as the perfect sort of worker for the cruise lines« (Terry 2014: 73). The author's findings show that Filipino workers are consistently hired in cruise ships for subordinate positions and not for leadership ones such as captains. »This case shows the subtle ways that labor becomes stratified along ethnic lines and how discourses become the fault lines that define and reproduce the great inequalities between different groups of workers« (Terry 2014: 73). The assumption that these labourers' work abroad necessitates a continuous flow of remittances back home to their children is translated into their willingness to accept harsher working conditions and not lose their employment. As a hiring manager noted, »Filipino has long patience. If be as motivation is my family [then] I'll be alright for your exploitation« (Terry 2014: 87). Others felt that their ›subservience‹ led to their exploitation, which included keeping them within a racial hierarchy and in subordinate positions on the ships.

Based on Purvis and Hunt (1993) and Burawoy (1979), Terry used the idea that, through discourse, workers – in this case foreign migrant workers – are interpellated by managers or employers into subjects and identities based on stereotypical framings of race, ethnicity, gender, and class. »[W]orkers are described and spoken about in ways that structure their roles in tourism. This is especially true of migrants and the element of difference that they project« (Terry 2014: 79). »[S]uch interpellations have a large hand in producing highly segmented labor markets where idealization of workers based on ethnic stereotypes essentially funnels workers into their respective positions within the working hierarchy – in short, making it seem as if they belong there« (Terry 2014: 78). Moreover, workers internalise such discourse and come to own or believe that they are the origins of such discourse.

Related to this last point, Tsing (2009, 2015) assessed the combination of self-exploitation and super-exploitation by workers whose self-identities are shaped along racial and ethnic lines. Tsing (2015) seeks to understand and explain these processes through anthropological research on mushroom pickers in the US. Mushroom pickers' engagement in activities of super-exploitation (where they earned very little for the time required and effort made to find and pick specialty mushrooms) was the result of pickers identifying themselves not as employees but as independent or free individuals who rejected wage labour and government structures and institutions. The majority of the mushroom pickers Tsing followed were refugees from Southeast Asia (Laos and Cambodia) who arrived in the US during the 1980s. These workers tended to struggle to find waged jobs and described their experiences in the mushroom camps as reminiscent of their villages or refugee camps in Southeast Asia.

In Tsing (2009), the focus is on the imaginaries of white males in the US who own their own land, which is used for poultry farming, but who are contract farmers

and hence not independent within the GVCs they are producing for. Despite making very little money on average, their imagined superior difference as a white, male, and American ›business owner‹ and not only a ›worker‹ resulted in their continued self- and super-exploitation. In both these case studies, Tsing showed how blurring the lines between employee and entrepreneur, when intermingled with immigrant identities and with discrimination faced in the US waged jobs market or with ideas of superior white American business owners, can lead to self- and super-exploitation. Tsing helps us understand not only the diversity of workers in GVCs, including in its fringes, but also the role race and ethnicity plays in shaping worker experiences.

Unfree Labour and Postcolonial Legacies

We know historically and from research on migration that race places a key role in the exploitation of migrant workers, including forced labour (McGrath 2013; Philips and Mieres 2015; Raj-Reichert 2000). Research on trafficking of foreign workers and in situations of forced labour in GVCs considers how these outcomes are shaped by racial prejudices, which hark back to legacies of colonialism. McGrath (2013, 2016), one of the more prominent researchers on migrant workers and forced or unfree labour in GVCs, analysed how »processes of racialisation facilitate the imposition of restrictions on workers' mobility, degrading conditions and intensification of work« in the sugar cane industry in Brazil [that is part of the ethanol industry] GVC (McGrath 2013: 32). The use of unfree labour by distilleries and growers was the result of their inability to cope with mechanisation and competition over increased productivity in the GVC. Based on sociologist Robert Miles' (1987) understanding of racism as a relation of production that enables unfree labour in different settings, McGrath ties the rise and connection of this phenomenon to the weakening or lack of labour regulations within GVC industries. In addition, local beliefs and traditions on differentiation by race can be made part of a wider system of this extreme form of exploitation (Gold et al. 2015; see also Bales et al. 2009). In South Asia, for example, debt-bonded labour is interconnected and facilitated through caste systems. The racialisation of communities, together with racial hierarchies that assign certain groups of workers to more difficult, dangerous, and poorly paid forms of work, can easily result in forced labour (McGrath 2017). In McGrath's case study, black migrant workers were socially constructed to be seen as suitable for difficult and degrading work and even as deserving of lower standards of living – a recurring theme in this contribution (see Eriksson et al. 2019; Terry 2014). This shows how labour is embodied and that socially constructed identities influence how different types of workers are valued – in this case, how black migrant workers are de-valued. McGrath (2013) also noted how the social construction of migrant workers as ›others‹ though their being racialised as a group corresponds to attitudes

towards black slaves in Brazil during the 19th century. The inhumane treatment that they received, which included particular features of poor dwelling spaces, reflected an ideology that was connected to Brazil's racialised legacy and the treatment of slaves. McGrath showed how actions based on colonial ideologies are part of the process of labour devaluation in GVCs.

Similarly, Wise (2013) noted the ways in which historical colonial legacies of South Asian indentured workers in Southeast Asia influenced the racial prejudices and views of foreign migrant workers from India in Singapore. Foreign workers in factories of the electronics industry GVC were exploited through the denial of a minimum wage, the absence of employment protections such as regulations on working hours and working conditions, and the lack of social protections such as pension and healthcare. Some workers find themselves in situations of forced labour. Wise found these outcomes to be rooted in the colonial era of indentured labour and slavery, histories upon which the Asian region is built.

The role of the state, which tends to be downplayed in GVC research, is discussed by Wise (2013) as a complicit actor in the plight of racialised foreign workers in Singapore. The author discussed moral detachment strategies by both employers and the state, which gain economically from maintaining the precarious employment of temporary foreign workers. In Singapore, the government designates which source country can supply workers to which sector. Hence, certain industries are dominated by workers of specific races and nationalities. As a result, »particular races begin to become synonymous in the public mind with certain forms of manual labour or service,« and this is compounded by »spatial segregation (such as workers' dormitories) and gatherings on a Sunday in places like ›Little India.« These workers »come to be seen as a racialised ›mass‹ rather than people with individual lives, families and aspirations. In the end racialised foreign workers are morally distanced, and dehumanised« (Wise 2013: 448).

Racial Discrimination in GVC Employment

Analyses of the outcomes for workers in GVCs are rarely unpacked or differentiated on the basis of race. As a result, GVC research has an underdeveloped understanding of how racial differences impact who are the predominant winners, who are able to upgrade, and who are the losers of GVC participation. When the analytical lens focuses on the question of race, however, the differences are revealing. This section presents research by different authors who address this question in a variety of sectoral case studies.

Christian (2016) contributes to the GVC disarticulations literature in order to understand economic and social upgrading as a racial (and gendered) process that leads to a continuation of social difference and hierarchy in the tourism GVC in

Kenya. The author examined the social construction of who, along racial lines, are considered the most capable in the Maasai Mara National Reserve in Kenya, which is a part of the tourism industry GVC. The author incorporated racialised and gendered ideas and assumptions as factors that shape upgrading processes. The author's conceptual analysis leans on Glenn's (2000) intersectional approach to race and gender, where »gender is racialized and race is gendered« (quoting Glenn 2000 in Christian 2016: 30). This conceptual framing is constituted by social structures and representations. Christian connects this with the analytical approach of the cognate global production network (GPN) by setting the GPN as the social structure whereby race and gender are incorporated into societal, network, and territorial embeddedness. The case examined was the economic upgrading of the Maasai Mara National Reserve, which occurred with the opening of safari camps. Those who benefitted the most were white, Kenyan-Asian, and expatriate. Christian explains this as part of network embeddedness, whereby these actors, unlike the indigenous peoples in Africa and the Maasai, were able to tap into racial networks to gain access to financial capital and international markets. The findings also show that racial/gendered assumptions and beliefs affect firm decisions over labour, for example in the hiring of the tour guides, who were always expatriate or Kenyan-Asian. Christian explains the outcomes of the economic and social upgrading whereby indigenous African and Maasai workers remained in the lowest value positions, while whites, Kenyan-Asians, and expatriates achieved higher valued jobs.

This relates to the racial hierarchy in the Kenyan tourism sector, which is based on a colonial history. British colonial rule created particular racial (and gendered) discourses, including representations, metaphors, and symbols, about different ethnic groups in Kenya (the Maasai versus the Indians for example). Indeed, white hunters started Kenya's safari tourism industry, which has continued into post-independence years. The colonial past continues to fuel the imagery and symbolism about the Maasai and the racial hierarchy of the Maasai Mara National Reserve. While tour/safari operators were white, Kenyan-Asian, and expatriate, those in the camping and lodging sites on Maasailand were Maasai. National operators had to undergo subjective assessments of whether they could deliver the ›service‹ from a white tourist perspective. White, Kenyan-Asian, and expatriate men were socially embedded as more culturally similar to the Global North and hence possessed the right skills; »such ›appropriateness‹ reinforces the economic value of ›white‹ skills in the national marketplace of tour operators« (Christian 2016: 35). As part of societal embeddedness, these tourism providers were socially constructed as those who were most capable of managing the tourism site. Christian concludes that »Gender and race are organizing principles in GPNs because gender and racial inequalities are an intrinsic part of social formations and material lived realities across geographies. GPNs [global production networks] draw on pre-existing patterns of social

difference and hierarchy to perpetuate and accentuate its forms« (Christian 2016: 26).

A number of authors reported on racial hierarchies in GVC production locations. Gutelius (2015), for example, documented in the logistics hub in Chicago (a cornerstone industry for the smooth functioning of GVCs), »the sorting of workers into echelons that have marginally more or less claim to security and dignity. Various markers of social difference shaped this sorting process, including race and ethnicity, documentation status, gender, and disability« (Gutelius 2015: 58).

Prentice's (2015) research on workers in garment factories in Trinidad showed racial differentiation on shopfloors. Afro-Trinidadian workers were placed in the back of the factories in lower skilled positions while Indo-Trinidadian workers were in higher skilled positions in the front of the floors.

Fotoyi (2020) discussed the case of platinum mining in South Africa, which is part of the platinum mineral GVC. Economic transformation of the sector due to its participation in the GVC impacted society in different ways, including with regard to race relations. Within the overall mining sector, platinum mining did not meet some of the objectives of the Broad-Based Black Economic Empowerment (BBBEE) program, such as black ownership, employment equity for black worker participation, skill development opportunities for black people, and preferential procurement for BBBEE qualifying businesses. There was improvement for black South Africans in terms of employment in the positions of director and manager and with regard to the development of small black-owned companies and social investment. By using quantitative measurements to discern the difference in outcomes for white versus black South Africans, Fotoyi (2020) was able to show a differentiated picture of the beneficiaries within a mining location in the GVC.

Another part of the research by Wise (2013) included a case study of an exploited Mozambiquan worker on a Taiwanese-owned fishing vessel, which was part of the fisheries GVC off the coast of Singapore. The worker was in a situation of forced labour, unable to leave when desired, with extremely harsh working conditions and poor or no pay. Employment positions on the vessel were characterised by a racial hierarchy. Higher ranking officers were often assigned according to race and nationality. They tended to be lighter skinned Europeans, Chinese, or educated Filipinos. Salary payments for the same work also differed based on national origin.

Ouma (2015) discussed racial hierarchies and subjectivities that determine how worker skills and value were configured and for what purpose in agriculture GVCs in Ghana. As part of in-depth case studies of peasant farmers in Ghana who were enrolled to produce organic mango and pineapples for the European consumer market, Ouma exposed the differentiation that was imposed and upheld by European »experts«, who set standards for production, against what was considered inferior knowledge and customary practices of African »locals« (Ouma 2015). The dismissal

of local knowledge, in favour of the ›rule of experts‹, in the end contributed to failures in producing significant yields for the market.

In recent years there has been significant growth in digital work or the outsourcing of online work as crowdwork through online platforms, which are themselves service GVCs. The experience of the racial differentiation of workers in crowdwork platforms is featured in research by Rani and Furrer (2020). The authors examined how algorithmic management of digital labour platforms perpetuated racial discrimination, amongst other forms of discrimination. Findings from surveys, platform observations, and interviews showed that platform designs excluded the participation of workers based on their geographies or country locations. For example, workers from the Global South were not able to access tasks that were higher paid. This is referred to as a ›hiring penalty‹ whereby stereotypes and information asymmetry about worker quality result in geographical discrimination of workers from the Global South. Platform design features also allowed outsourcing clients to block workers in certain countries from accessing better paid tasks. The authors found that workers in the USA performed higher skilled and higher paid tasks in comparison to workers in India. For example, an American worker on average earned 2.5 times more than an Indian worker on the digital platform AMT. Similar observations were made by Galperin and Greppi (2017) in a comparison of crowdworkers in Latin America and Spain.

Aiming to understand the full scope of racial discrimination within GVCs also requires pushing the boundaries of which types of workers have traditionally been considered to be GVC workers. Workers who are not directly employed by outsourced suppliers but work on the edges as precarious workers in the informal sector, and who aid, support, and enable the functioning of GVCs, are particularly vulnerable, as informal workers, to racial discrimination. Medina (2020) discusses the perpetual reproduction of racial discrimination amongst black street hawkers in Brazil who sell SIM cards at the end of mobile phone GVCs. These are the spaces where GVCs touch down to the consumer. The spaces in which street vendors work and the discrimination they face from unwarranted police harassment was linked to their race through racial profiling. The micro-scale accounts reveal that street vendors face exploitation as part of racial discrimination through low-pay, strenuous working conditions, such as rising sales quotas and abusive supervisors, while they market the key component for the sale of the final product – SIM cards for mobile phones.

Racism in Worker Governance and Management Within GVCs

Since the 1990s, public campaigns and exposures of labour violations and poor working conditions across production locations in the Global South have led brand

firms of GVCs to develop self-governing mechanisms, composed of codes of conduct and audits of outsourced factories, with the aims of improving working conditions and preventing labour violations (see Lund-Thomsen & Lindgreen 2014; Raj-Reichert 2011, 2020). Today corporate-led labour governance processes are widespread across GVC industries as part of elaborate corporate social responsibility (CSR) programmes. This reflects a general gap in the governance of working conditions in production locations in the Global South, where labour regulations either are weak or are not enforced.

A large and dedicated stream of research on labour governance practices in GVCs has aimed to understand how these processes, which largely originate in the Global North, are implemented in the Global South and with what impact on workers. Racialised perspectives and racial discrimination feature in how these governance programmes are designed, carried out, and experienced by a variety of actors in GVCs. Much of this has to do with the development of these governance programmes in the Global North, which reflects racialised ideas of colonial rule and Western »expertise«.

McCarthy et al. (2020) discuss the origins of labour governance systems in GVCs in order to expose their racialised origins, namely white men in the Global North who designed the audit programmes. These programmes »suggest southern actors are offenders to be externally monitored, in order to uphold northern righteousness (Elias & Beasley 2009)« (McCarthy et al. 2020: 2060). It invokes the scenario of »white-knight«, heroic managers helping develop less fortunate local producers« and also plays into the construction of northern consumers having an ethical conscience (McCarthy et al. 2020: 2061). The authors discern a racist discourse on control and authority whereby northern firms threaten or practice the issuance of fines or order cancellations to Southern producers who do not comply with their audit programmes.

One example is captured in research on occupational safety and health governance in the electronics industry in Malaysia. The implementation of private self-governance over working conditions depends on enforcement or compliance in outsourced factories. This responsibility falls on middle managers, for example Human Resources managers or Occupational Safety and Health (OSH) managers, in the factories. Research on electronics factories in Malaysia that assemble products for American brand firms revealed how self-governance mechanisms for health and safety conditions included racially and culturally differentiated opinions about factory workers by »Western« trained OSH managers (Raj-Reichert 2013). Research on different factories showed local OSH managers were trained to monitor and report on OSH incidents according to corporate codes of conduct and audit procedures developed in headquarter locations in the United States (US). Personnel from headquarter locations in the US were the trainers of the local managers. While OSH managers were themselves non-white, for example either ethnic Indian or

ethnic Chinese, they invoked perspectives of anti-Asian racism. An example of the racialised undermining of workers through labour governance processes is an explanation given by an OSH manager on the challenges of maintaining a zero-accident workplace because it required »... the need to change ›mentalities‹, ›mindsets‹ or ›culture‹ in order to implant a safety culture in the workplace. An ›Asian culture‹ was blamed for weak local enforcement (regarding regulation and non-compliance) of the law or CSR standards. The blame is placed on racialised Asian workers and not on the nature or pressures of the work. Malaysians were said to be lacking education when their education was compared with the educational priorities in the US. One OSH manager noted that in the US safety is taught and considered important from childhood. The differentiation between Asian workers and cultures and US workers and cultures stretched to differences from childhood. There is a perception that there is a lack of proper education amongst Malaysian or Asian workers and that this deems them less able to understand the need to work in a safe manner. The racialised differences of workers in the Malaysian factory, which take place through comparison with Americans, were implicated in health and safety problems by the OSH manager, who said: »So you have to continuously educate them. Go for refresher, push them and then they change their mind set. They're, you know, the culture change we call it that. So especially when you deal with Asians, you know« (Raj-Reichert 2013: 27).

The racially inferior stereotype of Asian workers was also made clear by a director of another factory who described »communicating health and safety issues to operators [as] like ›talking with a child or youngster‹« (Raj-Reichert 2013: 27). As a result, relevant information about laws was not included in worker trainings because it was thought that workers would not be able to understand. These outcomes placed workers in a dangerous and risky situation where valid information about their labour rights with regard to their personal health and safety was withheld.

Another case of an attempt to change the mindsets of an ›inferior‹ or ›backwards‹ culture appears in connection with the management of ethnic differences in the garments industry that supplies GVCs in post-ethnic war Sri Lanka (Goger & Ruwanpura 2014; Ruwanpura 2017). As part of the case study of a factory that was built in the post-war area in the eastern part of the country and that hired both Sinhalese and minority Tamil workers as part of the post-war reconciliation and reconstruction plan, the authors discussed management styles by Sinhalese managers over minority young Tamil female workers, who were treated as ›backwards‹ and in need of training to adapt to the modern lifestyle of working in factories. This management mindset was not applied to Sinhalese workers. Fainting, spells, and fits of crying by Tamil workers were acknowledged as part of war trauma, however managers were not trained to assist a traumatised workforce, which was ethnic Tamil, and as a result did not intervene or assist in their recovery. Young Tamil women were also mainly in subordinated positions. Managers emphasised the need to maintain the ›sameness

of workers« on the factory lines. All managers were Sinhalese, the vast majority of whom were unable to speak Tamil. The authors assert »...that this disciplining is also about a silencing and perpetuating a tyranny of ethno-nationalist hegemony in post-war Sri Lanka« (Goger & Ruwanpura 2014: 15). These practices reflected the post-war ethno-nationalist reconstruction frameworks by which the Sri Lankan government silenced Tamil voices. »Thus, managers in Factory A were not merely intent on creating a new mindset for a new class of workers, but also unthinkingly summoning paternalistic and ethnonationalist tropes in the hope of producing worker-subjects who would be able to leave behind the marks of their ethnicity and violent past...« (Ruwanpura 2017: 14).

Racial Discrimination Amidst GVC Borders

Invoking the role of borders in GVCs while researching agriculture GVCs, Berndt and Boeckler (2011) discussed how borders between Mexico and the US and between Morocco and the EU are managed. They also discussed how government authorities strategically invoke national discriminations and differences, which play on racial identities and the ›othering‹ of Mexican and Moroccan farmers, when these authorities are faced with a challenge. Their case study was on tomatoes that were grown in Mexico and Morocco and sold in the US and EU respectively, and that were made to be as standardised and ›undifferent‹ as possible for northern consumers. This involves various techniques such as certifications and production and product specifications. However, these processes, which aim to ›erase‹ the borders or differences between where a tomato is grown and where it is consumed, can be quickly reversed when faced with a crisis. This was the case during a 2008 Salmonella outbreak in tomatoes, which was eventually traced back to jalapeno and serrano chili productions in one region in Mexico. However, to maintain consumer confidence, especially regarding the competitor produce grown in the US, tomatoes, jalapenos, and serrano chilies grown anywhere in Mexico were banned by the US government from being sold in the US. This led to widespread mistrust by US consumers of fruits and vegetables from Mexico, including Mexican cuisine. The strategic summoning of the border during a time of crisis invoked the national difference within GVCs. It involves spurring on a heightened sense of the ›other‹ when faced with a food contamination crisis. This connects with the racialised and undervalued image of Mexican farmers and Mexican migrant workers, which is widespread on US farms (Bair & Werner 2011).

Also focusing on a border in a GVC, Werner (2011) addressed the racialised spatial divisions of labour in the garment industry in a free trade zone on the border that straddles the Dominican Republic and Haiti. Incorporating a historical perspective, in order to remind us of the legacy of black Haitian workers who were brought to the

Dominican Republic to work on the sugarcane plantations during US occupation, Werner shows how the differentiating of Haitian workers continued in the division of labour in the free trade zone garment factories that produce clothes for American brands and the US market. Dominican men were in management positions while the factory operators making the clothes were Haitian. The racial discrimination against Haitian workers was seen not only through their positions and lower wages, but also in the separation of their drinking water sources. Their water was sourced from the ground using filtration devices, whereas Dominican workers had access to delivered bottled water stations.

Bernd and Boeckler (2011) and Werner (2011) both show that while border differences in GVCs are normally kept invisible, they are invoked and used for racial differentiation for different ends.

Racialisation of Consumer Products and Services in GVCs

Several examples of the research reviewed showed how racialised imagery and discourse are used in one of the final rungs of the GVC – consumption. This was quite clear in discussions of the tourism service industry GVCs. Christian (2016) discussed the imagery and symbols of racialised and gendered bodies as »products« sold as tourism services and experiences in the Maasai Mara National Reserve. The Maasai were commodified for tourist consumption through imagery and representations of colonial tourism that presented an idealised picture of a »bygone colonial era« and »mythologiz[ed] and market[ed] the white hunter« (Christian 2016: 36). The author summarises: »racial and gender representations of African and Maasai subjectivities and their perceived skills positioned a racialized and gendered Maasai identity in opposition to white international tourism capabilities and standards, but in congruence with tourist desires. This supported the use of Maasai spaces and bodies as tourism products, but only in the correct tourism service roles as guides, artisans and low-level staff [i.e., for the consumer experience]. Even though the Maasai upgraded socially they only did so by fitting into a foreign image of African authenticity« (Christian 2016: 27–28). Christian (2016) links the discursive assumptions by customers, which involved the racialization of imagery and bodies, with the racial hierarchy at issue in the perceptions of skills, which were part of the upgrading of the Maasai Mara National Reserve, which was discussed above.

In Terry's (2014) case of the global cruise industry, racialisation of bodies and racialised assumptions about ethnicised Filipino service providers were the norm. The stereotype about Filipinos' strong family values resulted in expectations of a high level of service provision, which arguably involves a high degree of emotional labour in order to make »passengers feel good.« The former CEO of Carnival Cruise Lines also stated that it was difficult to find Americans with the same »flair for service hos-

pitality.« A lack of Filipino officers on the cruise lines was also blatantly attributed, by an executive of a recruitment agency, to Western white passengers being more comfortable with white leaders. In a vein similar to that of Terry (2014) and Christian (2016), Zhang (2013) showed how the imagery of Tibetan carpet weavers as »nomad artisans, inhabiting an idyllic, pre-industrial world« further essentialises the subordinate ethnic identity of the carpet weavers, which »shape[d] labor commodification and subjugation in Lhasa« (Zhang 2013: 761).

The connections between racial discrimination in production in GVCs are connected and reinforced by racialised marketing and selling of GVC products. In a similar vein, Ramamurthy (2004) noted how racialised imagery and discourses can be integral to and critical for the selling of GVC products. The selection of which product to racialise through commodifying the racialised bodies of workers is a marketing strategy. Ramamurthy (2004) cogently sets out that »case studies within the GCC [global commodity chain] literature have included primary products such as fish, fruits and flowers or clothing. In both sets of industries significant continuations and reconfigurations of colonial production regimes are visible, however narratives of marketing and consumption commonly mask these production processes. Because fish, fruit and flower products are usually minimally processed, places of production often appear in marketing strategies via images which seek to construct idealized »traditional« societies. However, the clothing commodity chain differs to the extent that marketing campaigns usually must erase images of processing in order that they can be replaced with images and narratives of consumption« (Ramamurthy 2004: 121). This is because GVCs of clothing and other industries, such as electronics or mining of precious stones, where labour is made invisible in advertising, are rife with labour violations and poor, harsh working conditions. In GVCs, a focus on consumption extends the racial politics of the »Southern worker« beyond production.

Related to consumption and imagery, Ramamurthy (2004) analysed the mainstreaming racialisation of the »white« and female consumer in order to critique the blind sightedness of GVC research and to challenge how we think about diversity and participation in GVCs. The dominant economic narrative is based on the figure of the white female consumer from the Global North, who is perceived to have the most purchasing power. Ramamurthy (2004) argues that this narrows our view of non-white GVC participants. The author presents the case of an Indian female entrepreneur in the UK who, building on her own consumption needs for diasporic fashion, established a global business of Indian clothing, which is now sold worldwide to the Indian global diaspora. The clothing was made in India, which provided, in addition to low costs, the imagery of the authenticity of production. This was not hidden but advertised to bring value to the clothes. Through this case study, which highlights the agency of »South Asian women in commodity chain initiation« (Ramamurthy 2004: 133), Ramamurthy aimed to present a contrast to the imagery of

South Asian women in the UK that presents them primarily as reproducers and traditional.

Race and Worker Power in GVCs

Research on worker power in GVCs in general is growing as more attention is paid to the aftermath of labour violations and incidences of poor working conditions, such as the Rana Plaza building collapse in Bangladesh, the mass strikes of workers in factories in China, or the wildcat strikes in the garment industry in Cambodia (Helmerich et al. 2020; Zajak 2017). Yet, very minimal research has been conducted so far to understand the role race plays in labour agency or worker power in GVCs. One case study that touches on race and worker power, albeit in a tangential manner, addresses the electronics industry in Penang, Malaysia, which is part of the electronics industry GVC, which has historically had a weak trade union movement involving racial politics and tensions (Raj-Reichert 2012). Malaysia is divided along racial and ethnic lines (see Ong 1999), an outcome of colonial era rule. Government economic and social development policies and subsidies, which favour the majority ethnic Malays over the minority ethnic Indians and ethnic Chinese in the country, have contributed to a clash of racial connections in the trade union movement. During the author's fieldwork in 2009 and 2010, the majority of electronic factory workers were ethnic Malays while the trade union movement was (and continues to be) led by ethnic Indians. Indian labour activists found it difficult to organise Malay workers, who placed their faith in the government and not the trade union to improve their working conditions. Malay workers' lack of trust in ethnic Indians, who they considered to be anti-government, led to the inability to collectively exercise worker power in the electronics industry.

Conclusion

This contribution on research on racism/racial discrimination in GVCs was conceptually and empirically diverse, covering a variety of GVC industries. The diversity in conceptual and theoretical approaches points to the fact that GVC research is largely heuristic and malleable for inter-disciplinary perspectives and analysis. This allows a wide opening for research on racism and racial discrimination in GVCs. There are clear benefits from a non-constraining research theme. Yet, as was also clear from this contribution, this openness also leads to fragmented contributions that do not easily speak to one another or support further theoretical inquiries in specific lines. This indeed reflects the origins of GVC research, which was preoccupied more with economic outcomes than social ones. Critical questions of race were not the foun-

dations of GVC research. Hence, the mentions of race that we find in the literature are sporadic and the approaches to racism/racial discrimination vary in their occurrence and consequences.

Despite this lack of coherence, however, it is clear from the contribution that there are concerns about the racism/racial discrimination that arises across GVC industries. While conceptual perspectives and terminology vary, GVCs that contribute to exploitation, devaluation, and discrimination along racial lines are found in a variety of settings. Hence, it is important to call for engaged research on racism/racial discrimination in GVCs and to understand patterns and themes vis-à-vis lead firm pressures and supplier behaviours and practices as well as government regulations concerning GVCs. A few parameters can be established based on the research reviewed in this contribution. First, migrant workers face an increased vulnerability and risk of racism/racial discrimination and exploitation. Second, outcomes of racism/racial discrimination result in unequal treatment, devaluation that is actual and perceived, racialised hierarchies at the workplace, poor and harmful working conditions and living situations, and even forced or unfree labour. Third, a variety of concepts help us understand these structures, processes, and consequences or outcomes. Despite the diversity of research perspectives, their focus largely coincides with regard to the meta-theoretical scale of labour value exploitation and the influences of postcolonial legacies and structures.

A few gaps in the literature can also be identified. One is on worker power in GVCs and how it intersects with race and racial discrimination. Another is a lack of understanding about how horizontal processes and institutions that experience or perpetuate racial discrimination, for example in production countries, intersect with the vertical processes of inter-firm relationships. Many more gaps indeed exist within the very early stage of research progress on this topic.

More research on racism/racial discrimination in GVCs can also assist the efficacy of recent and upcoming legislation to combat labour rights violations and harms to workers in GVCs. Growing attention in consuming countries, which are home to lead firms of GVCs, to the downsides for workers throughout the world has led to legislation aimed at governing working conditions in these chains. Within the European Union (EU) and the United Kingdom (UK), there has recently been new legislation that tackles poor working conditions and human rights violations in GVCs. At the EU level this includes a directive on non-financial disclosure, including on the prevention of forced labour in GVCs (2015); the EU Conflict Minerals Regulation (2021), which aims to prevent the sourcing of mineral from conflict zones and with the use of forced labour; and a pending EU system of mandatory due diligence for supply chains over human rights abuses. Individual countries have passed their own similar legislation, which includes the UK Modern Slavery Act (2015), the French Corporate Duty of Vigilance Law (2017), and the German Supply Chain Act

or the ›Lieferkettengesetz‹ (2021).³ The question of racism/racial discrimination, in all of its forms, is fundamental for understanding and rooting out who in GVCs are the most vulnerable to unfair treatment, harm, and abuse. Thus, more research on racism/racial discrimination in GVCs would help increase the efficacy of the outcomes of these legislations.

Moreover, rising awareness through increasing media coverage of worker violations in GVCs links consumption practices to outcomes for GVC workers. In view of the increasing discussion and debate on racism since the start of the Black Lives Matter movement in 2020 in the US, and subsequently in Germany (and Europe more widely), connections to policies and behaviours in consuming countries in the Global North that contribute to racism/racial discrimination within GVCs should also become increasingly salient.

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3 The US has passed similar various legislation over the past decade. They include the California Transparency in Supply Chains Act (2012) requiring companies to report on their efforts to eradicate slavery and human trafficking in their GVCs, the Dodd-Frank Wall Street Reform and Consumer Protection Act (2012) requiring companies to disclose origins of conflict minerals used, and the Federal Acquisition Regulation (2015) prohibiting forced labour in GVCs which supply the government, and The Trade Facilitation and Trade Enforcement Act (2016) which can ban imports of products made with forced labour.

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