I Am Not a Racist: The Discourse of Cultural Difference in Germany’s Sarrazin Debate

Abstract:

In 2010, Thilo Sarrazin’s book, *Germany Does Away with Itself* became the best-selling German nonfiction in decades. Sarrazin posited Germany’s demographic demise and triggered a nationwide debate on racism, immigration, and political correctness. This study investigates pre-existing discursive frameworks that allowed Sarrazin’s claims to catch and spread. After examining the history the foundational metaphors and narratives mobilized in the debate, I will focus on the construction of differential racism based on the metaphor of ‘culture’ in Sarrazin’s work. The culture metaphor promoted by Sarrazin is inextricable from eugenicist conceptions of society; its racial implications were immediately recognized and criticized in the initial backlash against his work. Still, Sarrazin managed to defend his approach by reframing the debate in terms of culture. This hard distinction between race and culture was facilitated by the underdevelopment of analytical conceptions of race in the modern German context.