A New Wave?

Of Structures and Stories

Edited by Sophia Brook and Katja Theodorakis

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About the editors

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Introduction

The special focus of this third volume in our series is a critical engagement with questions around racism, national identity, and their relationship to (violent) extremism/terrorism and democratic debate.

As is widely observed, including by the authors in the preceding two volumes of this series, greater diversity and fluidity are key characteristics of the emerging ecosystem. When it comes to analysis and prevention, a greater focus is placed on ideology, motivational factors, and the wider enabling conditions of extremism in democratic societies. The adoption of a new nomenclature by governing bodies and security agencies across democratic nations is reflective of such shifts:

- the 'ideologically vs religiously motivated' terminology used by Australia's domestic security agency ASIO, with the sub-categories of 'nationalist/racist' violent extremism identified as particular areas of concern;

- or the 'racially and ethnically motivated violent extremism (REMVE)' and 'violent right-wing extremism (VRWE)' designations common in the US, UK or EU for example.

Aside from signalling recognition of a changed threat environment, the updated terminology is said to provide greater flexibility for a more amorphous landscape.[1]

Germany's 'Office for the Protection of the Constitution' offers this definition, which explains how nationalism and racism are essential elements of the neo-National Socialist ideology in the German context:

"The field of right-wing extremism is characterised, to varying degrees, by elements of nationalist, antisemitic, racist and xenophobic ideology. Right-wing extremists allege that a person's value is determined by the ethnic group or nation they belong to. This notion is fundamentally incompatible with the Basic Law." [2]

In media and policy discourse, the broader terms of *far-right extremism* and *terrorism*, the *radical, far or extreme right* are more common, often used seemingly interchangeably. But the overall focus is the same: domestic and transnational networks groups which espouse some variation of racist, anti-Semitic, and Islamophobic ideologies and worldview, often with misogynistic and homophobic elements.

Whatever designation one uses, racism is commonly seen as at the centre of current and evolving manifestations of (violent) extremism. This comes following graphically violent attacks such as the 2019 Christchurch massacre, mass shootings like El Paso and Buffalo in the US or the Halle and Hanau attacks in Germany, which moved the issue of racism into the global spotlight.[3] At the same time, a growing focus on so-called structural racism, inequality and injustice in society more broadly followed from the death of George Floyd and the ensuing 'Black Lives Matter' protests. This is reflected in amplified international discourse and debates about 'white supremacy', seen as closely linked to a rise in transnational far-right extremism. As a result, at the policy level racism is recognized as a serious societal and transnational challenge – reflected, for example, in initiatives such as the EU's *'Anti-Racism Action Plan 2020–2025'*, Germany's first annual *'Situation Report on Racism'*, New Zealand's *'Royal Commission into the Christchurch Attack'* and its *'National Action Plan Against Racism'* (2022) or Australia's planned *'National Anti-Racism Framework'*, for which scoping reviews are under way. [4]

There is no doubt about the detrimental impacts if racism is allowed to persist – in particular, the pernicious effects of racist violence on individual lives. But despite much-needed political attention and policy initiatives, the applicability of concepts like 'white supremacy' and 'structural racism' across time and space is not as straightforward as assumed. Racism is, for a number of reasons, not a singular phenomenon.

For one, respective countries' historical experiences with colonialism vary, and so do their post-colonial trajectories. This is not always recognized or factored in, as one contribution to this volume discusses in detail. Moreover, the effects of racial discrimination within one society are also not uniform but varied, due to a myriad of contemporary variables; this is especially the case in multi-ethnic or migration societies. A recent study from New Zealand for instance, investigating the connection between racism and health outcomes in Aotearoa, noted how *"societies like New Zealand have transformed socially, culturally and demographically, but racism is largely still defined by histories of colonisation."* The study highlighted the need for more differentiated frames of analysis that consider the impact of other socio-economic variables and their interaction with structures of disadvantage in determining health quality.[5]

Such a thorough understanding of the interplay between institutional/systemic racial inequality and other sociological factors (to do with geography, family structure, socio-economic background, culture and religion) remains a challenge, both as an empirical focus and how such insights can be communicated to better inform public and policy debates about racism. This is, for example, illustrated in the controversy around the 2021 report by the UK's Commission on Race and Ethnic Disparities, the so-called *'Sewell Report'*.[6]

It goes without saying that this is a polarized space of public debate, which means any analytical contribution in this area requires careful positioning to avoid politicization, while at the same time avoiding censorship when expressing positions that may be politically unpopular.

Most importantly, there are important qualitative distinctions between **racism in a structural sense, as a system of institutions and practices that entrench bias and privilege in favour of majority groups, and explicit ideologies of racism, as religion-like belief in the primacy of one primordial group based on natural inequalities between human beings according to physical, essentialist characteristics**. And it is with the latter that the immediate connection points to (violent) extremism lie, since such views are inherently incompatible with the tenets of liberal democracy and its fundamental respect for individual rights.

This differentiation is fundamental to approaching the topic. Because if we conflate the two, we inadvertently create a label that throws citizens who hold prejudiced, discriminatory views (as unpalatable as that is) but who respect individual rights and do not act in a misanthropic way, in the same mixed bag with racist supremacists who

think foreigners are lesser human beings who do not deserve the same quality of life as we do, and those who violently express these beliefs or plan for race war.

In this volume, we engage with the topic by zooming in on particular debates on structural racism taking place in Germany – or, according to our authors, that **should** be taking place. We deliberately chose authors who have deep subject-matter knowledge from primary research in Germany, along with experience in other cultural contexts, such as in Australia and the US/UK.

Germany is known for its longstanding engagement to eradicate far-right violence, driven by the burden of its historical legacy. "Vergangenheitsbewaeltigung" – the responsibility to critically engage with the past – and a culture of remembrance of the Holocaust became central to Germany's post-war identity. The horrors of the Nazi era and Shoah certainly constitute the most consequential manifestations of racism and anti-Semitism. Yet, Germany's experience of racism did not end with the demise of National Socialism, with racist violence targeted at migrant Germans in consecutive decades. In the years following German reunification, extreme-right terrorism and racist violent attacks have claimed over 200 lives, with official figures said to underestimate the extent of the problem.[7]

The authors featured in this volume, Josefin Graef and Sandra Kostner, bring into sharp focus two distinct problem-sets associated with debates about racism, violence and belonging in Germany, highlighting what they perceive as key aspects of the debates we need to have: Zeroing in on the binary between 'Germans and Ausländer (foreigners/migrants), Dr Graef's contribution examines framings of 'Germanness' in connection to far-right/racist violence, such as the string of killings perpetrated by the NSU terror cell and the Hanau shooting. She highlights the importance of stories – about the victims and their place in German society – in building resilient national responses. In a conversation with migration expert Dr Kostner, we critically unpack the trajectory of 'structural racism' as the term made its way into the German debate. Dr Kostner highlights the discursive pitfalls that come from implanting abstract concepts from other contexts without the needed differentiation. Both experts raise important points about what is at stake: the effects of letting our societies be divided into 'us and them' – people who 'fully belong vs people who do not' or 'the inherently privileged versus the perpetually underprivileged'.

This way, their distinct vantage points open up a clearer view on the breadth of the problem-sets at hand, including where responsibilities and leverage points for prevention may lie. In discussing racism, one inadvertently addresses phenomena directly linked to injustice, violence, and trauma, historic as well as acute ones. For social scientists, this means situating oneself in spaces fraught with heightened emotion from political controversy, as well as in connection to human suffering and its instrumentalization by different groups and power interests. In their contributions to '*A New Wave?'*, Dr Graef and Dr Kostner speak their 'researched truth' as academics dispassionately, with candour as well as nuance, highlighting what they consider to be the key issues and controversies at stake. The results are thought-provoking insights about the relationship between racism and violence, as well as its impact on national identity/ belonging and democratic debate. These insights apply well beyond Germany.

Structural racism seems to emerge as one of those entrenched areas of contention and conflict, for which there are no easy policy solutions. As the contributions in this volume shed light on contrasting aspects of this debate, we can also see how these different facets may interlock. Despite Germany's 'exceptional' trajectory, value partners such as Australia and New Zealand share similarly complex friction points as they seek to navigate evolving extremism trends and challenges to democratic cohesion amidst unresolved historic controversies. Reflecting on how Germany is grappling with the rise of far-right populism for *Inside Story*, Professor Klaus Neumann observed a few years back: *"As far as postwar West German history is concerned, narratives that tell the past through the lens of its presumed outcomes all too often make success seem inevitable."[8]*

It is our hope that through this volume we can bring into better focus the range of issues at stake, highlighting the topic as worthy of ongoing critical discussion and empirical evaluation.

Katja Theodorakis
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Definitions

(Structural/Institutional) Racism as defined by:

The German Federal Anti-Discrimination Agency

The International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination defines racist discrimination "as any distinction, exclusion, restriction or preference based on "race", colour, descent, or national or ethnic origin which has the purpose or effect of nullifying or impairing the recognition, enjoyment or exercise, on an equal footing, of human rights and fundamental freedoms in the political, economic, social, cultural or any other field of public life."

Institutional racism refers to forms of discrimination, exclusion or disparagement that emanate from a society's institution, such as the police, public authorities or schools. It is not rooted in the prejudices or derogatory attitudes of the acting individuals. Rather, it is the interpretation or application of rules, regulations, norms, routines or ingrained practices that lead to the direct or indirect discrimination of certain population groups. Institutional racism is usually harder to identify than individual-level forms such as racist slurs or assaults and calls for other approaches to fighting it.

By contrast, *structural racism* cannot be traced down to individual institutions. Instead, it is about historically and socially evolved power relations that are deeply rooted in a society's structures, discourses or imagery. Such structures can also prevent certain population groups such as those with a migrant background or people of colour from being represented in key policy-making, administrative or economic positions proportionately to their share in the overall population.[1]

The Australian Human Rights Commission (AHRC)

Racism is the process by which systems and policies, actions and attitudes create inequitable opportunities and outcomes for people based on race. Racism is more than just prejudice in thought or action. It occurs when this prejudice – whether individual or institutional – is accompanied by the power to discriminate against, oppress or limit the rights of others. Racism includes all the laws, policies, ideologies and barriers that prevent people from experiencing justice, dignity, and equity because of their racial identity. It can come in the form of harassment, abuse or humiliation, violence or intimidating behaviour. However, racism also exists in systems and institutions that operate in ways that lead to inequity and injustice.[2]

The AHRC National Anti-Racism Framework Scoping Report 2022

Systemic and structural racism refer to cultural norms, laws, ideologies, policies, and practices that are designed to promote the interests of a single demographic while creating barriers or reinforcing racial inequity for individuals outside of this demographic.

This macro level functioning of racism operates without needing dedicated laws, policies or practices to keep it in place, and underpins and enables other forms of racism to operate.[3]

"The Racism No Way Education" for Australian Schools

Institutional racism (or systemic racism) describes forms of racism which are structured into political and social institutions.

It occurs when organisations, institutions or governments discriminate, either deliberately or indirectly, against certain groups of people to limit their rights. This form of racism reflects the cultural assumptions of the dominant group, so that the practices of that group are seen as the norm to which other cultural practices should conform. It regularly and systematically advantages some ethnic and cultural groups and disadvantages and marginalises others.[4]

The Teaching Council of Aotearoa New Zealand

Institutional racism is the inherent bias of structures and institutions on which our society is built. In Aotearoa New Zealand the term institutional racism first entered public discourse in the 1970s and in two government reports published in the 1980s. Pūao-Te-Ata-Tū focused on overt, intentional forms of discrimination, defining institutional racism as:

… the outcome of monocultural institutions which simply ignore and freeze out the cultures who do not belong to the majority. National structures are evolved which are rooted in the values, systems and viewpoints of one culture only (1988, p19). In 2021, in the report Whakatika: A Survey of Māori Experiences of Racism institutional racism is described as Legislation, policies, practices, material conditions, processes or requirements that maintain and provide avoidable and unfair differences and access to power across ethnic/racial groups.

In her PhD thesis, teacher Liana MacDonald explores how our education system was established with the view that it would "civilise" or "Europeanise" the indigenous Māori population and that the values and structures that formed the basis of schooling, disadvantaged Māori from the very beginning, with many of these structures still existing today.

He Awa Ara Rau, a study of 70,000 Māori learners said Māori were disproportionately represented in low-ability classes, which hampered their ability to get the qualifications that lead to well-paid jobs. "How students are streamed is in itself problematic. Bias and deficit thinking play a key role in this. The number of Māori placed in foundation classes is way out of proportion to non-Māori. This is systemic racism,"[5]

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Understanding Right–wing Extremism and Structural Racism in Germany: Why Stories Matter

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About the Author

Josefin Graef is an Associate Researcher at Aston University, Birmingham, UK. Her work centres on the place of far-right violence and terrorism in the social and political imagination of Europe and the global "West" since the end of the Second World War. She received her PhD from the University of Birmingham, UK, in 2017. She has previously been a DAAD/AGI Research Fellow at the American-German Institute, Johns Hopkins University, in Washington, DC (summer/autumn 2023) and a Dahrendorf Postdoctoral Fellow at the Hertie School in Berlin (2018-1019). Josefin has published on narrative methods, political violence, the populist radical right, and German politics. This paper draws on her PhD work as well as her book *Imagining Far-right Terrorism: Violence, Migration, and the Nation State in Contemporary Western Europe*, which was published as part of Routledge's Studies in Fascism and the Far Right Series in 2022.

Introduction

In recent years, Germany has made considerable progress in how it deals with racism and right-wing extremism. Triggered by a series of deadly right-wing terrorist attacks and widespread racist violence in the wake of the 2015 migration management crisis, both issues are now more present in political debate, and governments have made available increased resources, financial and otherwise, to tackle them. The *National Action Plan against Racism* (June 2017),[1] the "set of measures for combatting right-wing extremism and hate crime" (October 2019),[2] the 89 measures "for combatting right-wing extremism and racism" (November 2020),[3] and the 10-point Action Plan against Right-wing Extremism (March 2022)[4] are but four of many important initiatives.

There has also been a qualitative shift. In January 2023, the Federal Commissioner for Migration, Refugees and Integration (as well as Anti-racism) presented the first-ever situation report on *Racism in Germany* to the public. Drawing on innovative survey data,[5] the report concludes that "a clear majority of the population" perceives racism – i.e., the learned practice of devaluing and hierarchising people based on the social construction of homogeneous ethnic, cultural, or religious groups with innate, inheritable, unchangeable, and inferior traits, values, and behaviours – as "a problem that concerns society as a whole".[6]

The report also acknowledges that racism against Black and Asian people, Muslims, Romani, and Jews (or those who are perceived as such) is not just a driver of political extremism. That is, it not only motivates efforts, both violent and non-violent, that are *explicitly* directed against the constitutional state and its liberal-democratic order, whose core is defined by human rights, popular sovereignty, political pluralism, and the rule of law.[7] Rather, racism also guides social interaction in Germany more broadly and thereby affects the everyday lives of a large part of the German population – whether on the street or online, at the workplace, on the housing market, or in encounters with law enforcement. This structural racism is different from the kind of explicit racist worldviews espoused by right-wing extremists, but – as the report goes on to say – it nevertheless has negative effects on individuals' life chances, their levels of trust in political institutions, and feelings of belonging. Ultimately, this makes for a less stable, less resourceful, and less cohesive society.[8] It also provides a permissive environment for right-wing extremism, which is now considered to be the "biggest extremist threat" in Germany.[9] This vicious cycle is why the federal government and the sixteen states (*Länder)* need to counter right-wing extremism alongside structural racism.

That a more comprehensive approach to countering right-wing extremism and racism is gradually emerging at the highest levels of German politics is a welcome development. This paper aims to contribute to furthering the development of such an approach by focusing on the importance of stories – the ways in which we connect our present to the past in order to imagine a future – for perpetuating racism, as well as for combatting it.

Stories are key to our understanding of who we are as societies because they give us a collective sense of identity, solidarity, and purpose. We generally prefer to tell positive stories about ourselves – of national heroes, of our past achievements, of how we overcame difficult times, of our ambitions and desires. By telling such stories and defining who we are, we also identify

"Others", those who are in some way different from "us". This process of "Othering", as it is called in sociological circles, can take benign forms, for example the simple idea that what makes the Germans "German" is that they are not French or Spanish. But in other cases, the difference becomes more primordial, where "Others" are defined as *essentially* different from "us" in terms of their ethnicity (or religion, culture) and can therefore never be (proper) members of society. Such exclusion mechanisms are a universal phenomenon in human history, but as a system of power, racism has its roots in the "age of discovery" and later the Enlightenment from the 15th to the early 19th century. Defining the peoples in colonised lands as the opposite of European civilisation – as "brutes" and "barbarians" who did not only look different but were incapable of rational thought and behaviour – is what made their exploitation possible by making it justifiable before God and themselves as good Christians. Conquest in the name of progress came first, racism second.[10]

The legacies of this history are still felt today. To illustrate, in an essay published in 1897, the black intellectual and civil rights activist William Edward Burghardt (W.E.B.) Du Bois (1868-1963) first posed the provocative question **"How does it feel to be a problem?"** concerning the place of black people in a white America. He had recently returned to the US from two years of studying in Berlin – at what was then the Friedrich Wilhelm University and today is Humboldt University. His thinking and language turned the Enlightenment ideals of freedom, cosmopolitanism, emancipation, and self-expression, as found in the texts of Goethe and Schiller, G.W.F. Hegel, Johann Gottfried Herder, J. G. Fichte, and Wilhelm Humboldt on their head; his intention was

to make freedom and opportunity a reality for *all* Americans and thereby help "the great republic" live up to its ideals.[11] As the killing of African American George Floyd by a white police officer in Minneapolis on 25 May 2020 and the anti-racist "Black Lives Matter" (BLM) protests showed, the US has yet to achieve this goal.

While these protests have also spread to Germany, the situation there is different from the US, not least because the relationship between white and black Americans does not translate well into the German context.[12] Nevertheless, as an ethnically diverse country of immigration, Germany faces a similar challenge: how can the republic fully live up to its own ideals of freedom and opportunity for *all* Germans and people living in Germany? It is good news that the representative survey data on which the *Racism in Germany* report builds finds that most Germans acknowledge the existence of racism in their country and support government action against it. At the same time, many respondents associate racism primarily with either right-wing extremists at home or with society in the US.[13] This indicates that more needs to be done to better understand the link between right-wing extremism and racism in German society more broadly.

Below I outline an approach for working towards such an understanding that focuses on the relationship between the grand stories that contemporary right-wing extremists and liberal democracy tell vis-à-vis each other.

Grand Stories: Right-wing Extremism and Liberal Democracy

Why is right-wing extremism a problem in a liberal democracy? To most, the answer will be self-evident: an ideology of fundamental inequality between human beings contravenes the key principles of human dignity, equality, and pluralism that liberal democracies build on. In Germany, these principles are enshrined in the constitution, the Basic Law, or *Grundgesetz* (GG), from 1949, which defines human dignity as inviolable (Art. 1 GG) and outlaws discrimination based on "race", origin, faith, gender, and so on (Art. 3 GG, "Equality before the Law"). Since Germany is a democratic state, all state authority derives from the German people, whereby "German" refers to anyone who holds German citizenship (Art. 20(2) and Art. 116 GG).

In light of an increasingly transnational and agile far-right that has learned to couch its racist ideas into a language of freedom and (ethno-)pluralism, the detection of right-wing extremist networks within state institutions, and the many violent attacks against political representatives and (other) civilians that have occurred across the country in recent years, German governments have become increasingly conscious of the fact that rejection of liberal-democratic principles is not limited to a bunch of self-declared enemies of the constitution on the fringes of society. However, they have not generally gone as far as to question the existence of a clear dividing line between right-wing extremism and liberal democracy. At a time when liberal democracy is increasingly under threat, doing so seems counter-intuitive to say the least. Surely, it is imperative that we re-affirm our commitment to the norms and values of liberal democracy and stand up to those whose declared aim it is to abolish the

liberal-democratic order.[14] This is undoubtedly the task before us. The question is: how we do this, given that in reality, substantial flaws accompany liberal-democratic practice(s)?

Specifically, the problem is that the way in which we talk about liberal democracy often undermines its status as *the* counter-model to right-wing extremism and thereby weakens it. To understand how and why this happens, and what to do about it, it is helpful to think of the relationship between (violent) right-wing extremism and liberal democracy in terms of opposing yet connected stories.

The grand story behind right-wing extremism

The contemporary extreme-right, in Germany and elsewhere, spans a range of ideologies, from identitarianism to neo-Nazism and anti-Islam factions such as the "Patriotic Europeans Against the Islamisation of Occident" or PEGIDA (*Patriotische Europäer gegen die Islamisierung des Abendlandes*). In spite of the differences between them (relating for instance to intellectual traditions and specific enemy images), they increasingly converge around a powerful, transnational story of loss, betrayal, revenge, and rebirth. They see (Christian) white people as superior to other "races" or cultures and therefore consider political, social, economic, and legal inequalities between whites and these allegedly inferior groups as natural, justified, and desirable. In an increasingly interconnected world, they consider this natural, white supremacist order under threat from not only these "inferior others" themselves, but also from the political and cultural elites – often defined as an all-controlling global Jewry – who enable and promote their migration

to, and existence and prosperity within, white-majority countries.[15] This combined belief in supremacy and victimisation motivates a call for retributive action against both "inferior others" and "internal traitors" in the name of defending or restoring a white supremacist order.[16] In recent years, this story has increasingly played out in violent attacks in everyday spaces, such as workplaces and private homes, in houses of worship, in shops, clubs, and bars – not just in Germany.

Thinking of contemporary right-wing extremist violence in terms of this grand story –composed of loss and betrayal in the past, a call for revenge in the present, and the promise of a better future for the ethnic majority – raises an important question, especially given that their narrative resonates increasingly with parts of the population: what (counter-) story do liberal democracies like Germany tell about themselves? And how effective is this story?

The grand story of liberal democracy

Reducing individuals' identities to their (real or assumed) membership in ethnic, cultural, or (and) religious groups, assigning immutable characteristics to and asserting the existence of a natural hierarchy between them is, as the *Racism in Germany* report puts it, "fundamentally at odds with the free democratic basic order and an open, pluralistic society guided by a model of equal opportunities."[17] This idea of Germany's liberal-democratic order as inherently anti-racist finds its expression not only in the Basic Law. It also corresponds to the powerful story that Germany tells about itself.

This story is a story of success. Its main contours are defined by Western and European integration on the one hand and the process of *Vergangenheitsbewältigung*, or "working off the past", on the other hand. It goes something like this: following a long period of repression and a focus on German suffering after the end of the Second World War, (West) Germany eventually managed – owing to persistent efforts from below as well as favourable social, economic, and political conditions – to accept its dictatorial, nationalist, anti-Semitic, and genocidal past as central to its collective identity. Through this process, it came to acknowledge its historical guilt, embrace the duty to remember, and accept its responsibility to prevent such evil from ever happening again, in Germany and elsewhere in the world.[18]

After the fall of the Berlin Wall on 9 November 1989 that had separated the Federal Republic in the West from the German Democratic Republic (GDR) in the East and reunification of the two Germanies less than a year later, Germany held on to its success story – in spite of the high levels of racist violence in the wake of this historical moment. The process reached its peak in the late 1990s when the first left-of-centre coalition came to power on the federal level after sixteen years of CDU/CSU-led governments under "chancellor of unity" (*Einheitskanzler*) Helmut Kohl, and the German capital was moved (back) from Bonn to Berlin, giving Germany the sense of a new beginning. As the historian Edgar Wolfrum concluded in 2006, the history of the Federal Republic is the history of a "successful democracy" (*geglückte Demokratie*). In 1945, and even decades later, this had not been a foregone conclusion.[19]

Since the turn of the millennium, Germany's status as a "country of immigration" has gradually become incorporated into this success story. The history of post-war immigration to the two Germanies is long and complex, shaped by their own political interests and economic needs as much as world events. The different groups of immigrants include ethnic German expellees in the immediate post-war years and late resettlers after the collapse of the Soviet Union, guest and contract workers, for example from Turkey, Greece, and Vietnam, as well as refugees and asylum seekers from within and outside the European continent.

In the early 2000s, the term "integration" gradually found its way into German immigration debates to account for this reality, flanked by landmark changes to immigration and citizenship law. The first integration summit was held under the leadership of Chancellor Angela Merkel in July 2006 and a first *National Action Plan for Integration* was published a year later with the declared aim, as Merkel put it in her foreword, to make Germany a "common home" and a "loveable and livable *Heimat*" for all.[20] Paradoxically, it is precisely this effort to actively shape the process of growing together as a diverse society that has led to greater contestation of what it means to be German. This is because now more people from a wider range of personal and cultural backgrounds get to be part of the debate (the German sociologist Aladin El-Mafaalani calls this the "integration paradox"). As Merkel's foreword to the Action Plan makes clear, "integration" also, rather unhelpfully, started out as a deficit-oriented concept, focused on the lack of German language skills, low levels of education, and high levels of unemployment among "people with a migration background"[21]

vis-a-vis "Germans". Over time, this has led to a particular way of thinking about Germany as a country of immigration, as Afro Germans, Turkish Germans, Arab and Muslim Germans, in particular, have come to play a double role in the German success story:

On the one hand, their physical presence *in* Germany is often seen as proof that it is indeed the kind of open and pluralist country that right-wing extremists reject. This became particularly clear on 31 August 2015 when Chancellor Merkel opened her summer press conference by presenting the influx of migrants, refugees, and asylum seekers (many of whom were expected to settle long-term) as a vindication of Germany's success story: "The world sees Germany as a land of hope and opportunity, and it really wasn't always like that."[22] On the other hand, there is still a sense that "immigrants", because they presumably arrived in the country later than "the Germans", continue to be somehow "different *from*" them. That is, they are not (fully) recognised as being *of* Germany, even if they were themselves born in the country, are German native speakers or hold German citizenship. The two sides – being key to Germany's national identity and yet not belonging fully – are tied together through the liberal-democratic promise that "immigrants" can become "like the Germans" through a process of integration. In this way, an idea is preserved that "full" or "proper" Germans exist as a neutral reference group around which society is organised and its problems of living together can be defined.

The Federal Expert Commission on Integration has recently acknowledged the problematic legacy of this dominant integration discourse and demanded a more comprehensive approach to integration as

an "ongoing" and "unending" task for *all* of German society that is not limited to managing immigration.[23] This is indeed crucial because the formula "*in*, but not yet *of* Germany" comes dangerously close to identifying "immigrants" as a "problem people", which Du Bois warned against more than a century ago. The consequences of this are particularly apparent in the context of right-wing extremist violence.

Responding to right-wing extremist violence

After major right-wing extremist attacks, democratic leaders often invoke Germany's post-war success story because they consider it a natural antidote to the extremist worldview expressed through such violence. As then-Chancellor Merkel said in her speech honouring the victims of the Neo-Nazi terrorist cell *National Socialist Underground* (NSU) on 23 February 2012:

> "Human dignity is inviolable. To respect and protect it shall be the duty of all state authority." – These are the first words of our constitution [*Grundgesetz*]. It was the answer to twelve years of National Socialism in Germany, to unspeakable contempt for human beings and barbarism, to the breach of civilisation [*Zivilisationsbruch*] that was the Shoa. "Human dignity is inviolable." That is the foundation for our living together in our country, of the free democratic basic order of the Federal Republic of Germany. Whenever people in our country are excluded, threatened, persecuted, it violates the foundation of this free and democratic basic order, and the values of our constitution. This is why the murders by the Thuringian terror cell were also an attack on our country. They are a disgrace to our country.[24]

Between 1998 and 2011, the NSU, supported by an extensive right-wing extremist network, committed 10 murders, most of them targeting people with personal or family histories of migration to Germany from Turkey and Greece,[25] and attempted to murder dozens more in three bombings in cities across Germany, accompanied by a series of armed robberies. Its terrorist campaign was recognised as such only when their cover was blown in early November 2011.[26]

In some ways, Merkel's speech laid the groundwork for what would subsequently emerge as official government policy: intolerance and racism, she said, were not limited to right-wing extremists, but manifested themselves in everyday practices and expressions of contempt for and exclusion of others. This had clearly been shown by the racist media coverage of and criminal investigations into the targeted killings (labelled "Kebab murders" in 2005) and bombings before the discovery of the NSU's existence. Over a period of several years, journalists and investigators had homogenised and devalued the victims as "Turkish immigrants" who had "not yet properly arrived" in Germany, regardless of their factual Germanness as indicated by Germany being their country of birth or place of long-term residence, German citizenship, or (native) German language skills. Their "lifeworld" allegedly deviated from that of "the Germans" and remained difficult to penetrate: they were *in*, but not (yet) *of* Germany. In consequence, the victims, their families and communities were widely treated as part of the problem and as an obstacle to solving the crimes.[27]

In light of these facts, "good democrats", Merkel insisted, had to prove their commitment to human dignity, freedom, and pluralism by actively defending these values – including the "diversity" brought to Germany through immigration – on an everyday basis. "Germany", she said, included anyone who lived in the country, regardless of origin, appearance, beliefs, age, or disability.

How did this radically inclusive vision of Germany, an important lesson from the many scandals surrounding the NSU, compare to reality after November 2011? As Merkel's speech illustrates, once the perpetrators had been identified as Neo-Nazis, the victims and their families became central to positioning a successful, diverse, and liberal democracy against the right-wing extremists and their misanthropic ideology. The importance of them being *in* Germany was recognised. However, this still did not result in the victims being recognized as full members *of* German society.

The best illustration of this is the five-year NSU trial (2013-2018) at the Regional High Court in Munich. The task of the prosecution (which in Germany is part of the executive branch of government) was to translate the late realisation that the NSU's terrorist attacks were, as Merkel had put it, "also an attack on our country" into a legally viable story. The story that the prosecution presented, both in the indictment in 2012 and in the final plea in 2017, made clear that the perpetrators had violated the core principles of the relationship between the liberal-democratic state and its citizens. While the German population "with a migration background" had been the *immediate* target of terrorist violence, the state had been its *ultimate* target because the perpetrators had aimed to replace it with a national-socialist order and thereby return the country to the darkest period in its history. In the end, however, the state had prevailed.

On the face of it, this seems like a powerful way of extolling Germany's liberal-democratic achievements against enemies of the constitution. But the story had one major flaw: it subsumed the *experiences* of violence and terrorisation of the individuals and communities targeted by the NSU under the "liberal-democratic order" that had to be defended against the terrorists. As a result, the trial gave little space to victims' critique of state institutions and their demeaning and racist practices as this would have weakened the success story that the prosecution wanted to tell. Paradoxically though, that was exactly what the victims were trying to do: share their years of suffering with the wider German public so something like the NSU would never happen again and the German success story would be allowed to continue.[28]

Tragically, only a few years later, something like the NSU murders did happen again when, in the late evening on 19 February 2020, a local resident shot dead nine people in bars and kiosks in Hanau, a medium-sized city just outside Frankfurt/Main (Hesse).[29] In her press statement the next morning, Chancellor Merkel said that following the NSU's violent campaign, the murder of district president Walter Lübcke at his private home near Kassel (Hesse) by a right-wing extremist on the night of 1 June 2019, and the anti-Semitic and racist attack in Halle on 9 October 2019 that had left two people dead, the attacks in Hanau were yet another crime caused by the "poison of racism" in German society. Echoing her own words from the official state ceremony for the NSU victims eight years earlier, she reiterated that "the federal government and government institutions stand for the rights and dignity of every person in our country. We do not distinguish between citizens based on origin or religion. With all our strength and determination, we oppose those who try to divide Germany."[30]

Local politicians, members of parliament, and other officials were also quick to emphasise that "the victims were no aliens [*Fremde*]", but locals from Hanau and the

wider region whose murder had been motivated by racist hatred. The attack, the then-president of the *Bundesrat*, the upper house of the German parliament, Dietmar Woidke said, was "directed against [all of] us. […] All this has happened before in this country! It must not happen again."[31]

In some important ways, then, Germany seems to have learned from previous mistakes. At the same time, and in striking parallels to institutional responses to the NSU, the families of the victims in Hanau have struggled to access information about the police investigations and receive adequate compensation from the state. They also continue to struggle for the right to publicly commemorate the victims in a way that marks their lives and deaths as much of an intrinsic part of German history as for example the fairy tales of the Brothers Grimm, to whom Hanau dedicates a national monument on its market square.[32]

Conclusion

Thinking of racism, right-wing extremism and violence not only as threats from the fringes but also as problems that exist *within* liberal democracy itself challenges Germany's positive self-image in a fundamental sense. To be sure, these problems manifest themselves differently in Germany than they do in other Western countries, including in the US, which continues to see itself as an "exceptional nation" and has only just begun to critically examine its own violent past in a serious manner, with predictable (and consequential) backlash effects. For Germany, ironically, despite its success story, sincere defences of liberal democracy can go hand in hand with maintaining racist attitudes and practices, including through (but not limited to) the seemingly benign formula "*in*, but not yet *of* Germany".

In light of a reinvigorated extreme right, anyone expressively committed to liberal democracy, can no longer afford to tell a story of Germany that has an essential distinction between "the Germans" and "immigrants" at its core. Instead, to safeguard its historical achievements and move forward amidst a tense political climate, Germany needs to develop new ways of thinking about itself. This means devoting greater attention to violent histories and racist phenomena that have been marginalised in the past.[33] It also requires an honest confrontation with the national self-understanding behind its success story as a liberal-democratic country of immigration. This is not to say that crime and (other) social problems in an increasingly complex society should be left unaddressed, on the contrary. It simply means to address these problems without singling out and homogenising some of society's members as "problem people" – regardless of intention – and instead accept that German society, like any other, is made up of "people with problems".

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6 Die Beauftragte der Bundesregierung für Migration, Flüchtlinge und Integration / Die Beauftragte der Bundesregierung für Antirassismus, *Rassismus in Deutschland: Ausgangslage, Handlungsfelder, Maßnahmen*, Berlin, January 2023, https://www.integrationsbeauftragte.de/resource/blob/1864320/2157012/77c8d1dddeea760bc13dbd87ee9a415f/lagebericht-rassismus-komplett-data.pdf?download=1, p. 9. The definition of racism provided here deviates only slightly from the one cited in the report, which in turn is taken from the final report of the "Federal Government Expert Commission on the Framework Conditions for Integration Potential" released in November 2020 (here p. 15).

7 For "extremism" and the "free democratic basic order" as defined by the state see the glossary of the Federal Office for the Protection of the Constitution (Bundesamt für Verfassungsschutz, BfV), Germany's domestic secret service: https://www.verfassungsschutz.de/DE/service/glossar/glossar_node.html.

8 Die Beauftragte der Bundesregierung, *Rassismus in Deutschland*, p. 10.

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10 See e.g., Peter Harrison, "Enlightened Racism?", *ABC*, 10 June 2020, https://www.abc.net.au/religion/peter-harrison-enlightened-racism/12341988.

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12   However, as the *Racism in Germany* report acknowledges, Germany does have a black history of its own that is still little known, see Die Beauftragte der Bundesregierung, *Rassismus in Deutschland*, p. 11.

13   Nearly 60% of respondents locate racism primarily within the extreme-right, approximately 45% see in accusations of racism a restriction of freedom of expression, and just over 35% associate racism mainly with the US, see DeZIM, *Rassistische Realitäten*, chapter 5.

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15   Kacper Rekawek, Alexander Ritzmann, and Hans-Jakob Schindler, *Violent Right-Wing Extremism and Terrorism – Transnational Connectivity, Definitions, Incidents, Structures and Countermeasures*, Counter Extremism Project, Berlin, November 2020, https://www.counterextremism.com/sites/default/files/CEP%20Study_Violent%20Right-Wing%20Extremism%20and%20Terrorism_Nov%202020.pdf.

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17   Die Beauftragte der Bundesregierung, *Rassismus in Deutschland*, p. 78

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23   Federal Expert Commission on Integration, *Shaping Immigration Society Together*, p. 9.

24   Die Bundesregierung, "Rede von Bundeskanzlerin Angela Merkel bei der Gedenkveranstaltung für die Opfer rechtsextremistischer Gewalt in Berlin", 23 February 2012, https://www.bundesregierung.de/breg-de/service/archiv/alt-inhalte/rede-von-bundeskanzlerin-angela-merkel-bei-der-gedenkveranstaltung-fuer-die-opfer-rechtsextremistischer-gewalt-415478. The three core members of the NSU were born and raised in the East German state of Thuringia, but the group is now rarely referred to as a "Thuringian terror cell" to avoid the impression that the NSU was (just) a local problem.

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Making Space Again: Structural Racism and Democratic Debate

A Conversation* with migration historian and sociologist Dr Sandra Kostner

*This interview was conducted by the editors of this volume. It has been annotated with additional examples and quotes, incl. from Australia and New Zealand, to illustrate the points Dr Kostner raises.

Dr Sandra Kostner

Dr Sandra Kostner is a historian and sociologist specializing in migration research. She studied history and sociology at the University of Stuttgart and received her doctorate from the University of Sydney with a comparative thesis on the educational attainment of second-generation students of Greek and Italian origin in Germany and Australia. During her doctorate, she also worked as a lecturer in the Department of History and the Institute of Jewish Studies at the University of Sydney. Dr Kostner gained several years of non-university practical experience, including working as an employee in a consulting program for museums for Far North Queensland and in the Cairns City Council in the municipal development department and Department of Multicultural and Indigenous Affairs. Since 2010, she has been managing director of the master's program "Interculturality and Integration" at the Schwäbisch Gmünd University for Education in southern Germany. Dr Kostner's research focuses on comparative migration and integration policy with a focus on Germany, Australia and Great Britain; migration-related diversity as a challenge for liberal-democratic states; and social cohesion in diverse migration societies.

Among her many publications are the anthology "Lessons learnt from 9/11. How the West has dealt with Islamism" ('Lehren aus 9/11. Zum Umgang des Westens mit Islamismus'; co-edited with Elham Manea, published in 2021–2022; the edited volume "The Identity-Left's Redemption Agenda. A Debate on its Consequences for Countries of Immigration" (Identitätslinke Läuterungsagenda: eine Debatte zu ihre Folgen für Migrationsgesellschaften); and articles such as" Teaching and Learning Diversity: Making (Higher) Education More Accessible and Equitable" (2016–2017). Dr Kostner also authored the foreword to the German edition of "The Disuniting of America. Reflections on a Multicultural Society" by Arthur M. Schlesinger (2020), and edited a volume containing responses to Schlesinger's essay, titled: *The Us-against-Them-Society (Die Wir-gegen-die-Gesellschaft, to be published January 2024).*

Aside from her academic research and teaching, Dr Kostner's work has a distinct applied focus: she has, for example, been the leading research consultant for a number of government initiatives on integration and diversity at the state-level, such as for educational staff who teach children and adolescents from migrant families, or support of the 'Welcome to Baden-Wuerttemberg! Engagement for Refugees and Asylum-Seeker' project (2015–2017).

In February 2021, Dr Kostner co-founded the 'Academic Freedom Network', an association of academics dedicated to strengthening a liberal academic climate, by defending the constitutionally enshrined freedom of research and teaching against ideologically motivated restrictions and political censorship.[1]

STRUCTURAL RACISM

Excerpt from '*WELCHES ANTIRASSISMUSKONZEPT*?', by Dr Anette Ranko, KAS Kurzum July 2022

(Translated by Katja Theodorakis, with the author's permission)

"The concept of 'structural racism' in its various manifestations is receiving increasing attention in academic and civil society circles. Racism thereby acquired new meaning beyond its primary definition of devaluation and discrimination based on skin colour or ethnicity. The concept now at the same time denotes racism as an inherent feature of Western societies. 'Structural racism' [also] no longer only refers to skin colour or ethnicity, but also to (non-Western) cultures and religions. In addition, advocates of the concept focus particularly on language and prejudices as the vectors which anchor racism in society and, therefore, need to be combatted as such.

The prominent sociologist Aladin El-Mafaalani explains the concept as follows: Racism today may no longer be the dominant organizing principle of society and the world – the way it was during Western colonialism. Yet, according to El-Mafaalani, racism has become inscribed in today's "*society and its [...] institutions, it manifests in income, wealth and class disparities, it's experienced in culture and everyday life, and audible in language and so on. Racism holds the (unjust) society together.*" He continues: "*The ones privileged by racism benefit across all these dimensions, economic, cultural and psychological, whether they want it or not.*"

The significance of power relations in 'structural racism'

The concept of 'structural racism' assumes that individual intention is no longer a prerequisite for the constitution of racism. Rather, racism affects all members of a society – either as those who benefit from its manifestations or as those who are harmed by them. Due to this 'embeddedness' and legitimization of racism through the structures and powers that be, it follows that racist discrimination is primarily carried out by members of the 'privileged' or 'hegemonic' group. In contrast, possible racist behaviours by members of a disadvantaged group are conceptually devalued or described as the consequential expressions of a structurally racist majority society."[2]

Dr. Kostner, 'structural racism' appears to have become a bit of a buzzword in German debates. What does it mean in its original academic definition and how did the term get introduced in Germany?

Dr.K: In Germany, the so-called 'structural turn' gained currency in the mid-1990s. In its original meaning, it is about paying attention to the impact of structures. Especially in migration studies, it's about moving away from looking at individual agency, what individuals have to do to integrate. So, people started to look at how structures that are seemingly neutral affect people in different ways on account of their background.

For example, in terms of educational attainment, a structuralist perspective would show how for a pupil from an academic family it'd be easier to get through school, to get ahead. Particularly the three-tiered education system in secondary schooling in Germany was identified as a structural impediment*. Of course, this stratified system affected people differently, partly on account of their background. That's what researchers in Germany started to look into, beginning in the mid-1990s.

Editor's note: In contrast to comprehensive schooling common in Anglo-Saxon countries, in this system there are three different types of secondary schools: basic (finishes after Year 9), vocational (finishes after Year 10), or academic/advanced (until Year 13) – after four years of primary school, allocation is determined based on scholastic performance and aptitude.

So, does this 'structural turn' come down to paying attention to questions of stratification and class, a recognition that access to opportunities and advancement are a matter of socio-economic background?

Dr.K: It was indeed very much related to class, but to a certain degree also to culture. Migrants bringing with them different ideas of how important education is, how important it is to get ahead in life. This way, you see huge differences between different migrant groups. Some of them are highly successful in the education system, others are far less successful. Although when you look at their socio-economic background, it's pretty much the same. Despite this, one group moves faster ahead than the other. That was one of my chief findings in my PhD thesis.

Since the turn of the century, however, German researchers have increasingly taken up the notion that structures and racism are intrinsically linked. Following their colleagues in the US, where that notion was developed, many now view it as given that structures are inherently racist. They claim that the group that built a system, even if unconsciously, structured it in a way to suit its own needs, thereby disadvantaging all other groups. The evidence furnished is rather circular: every statistical imparity between groups is seen as the result of racist structures. Other explanations are hardly looked into anymore. Apart from this notion not holding up to empirical data, it has also changed how many researchers view society, that is: they divide people into oppressors and oppressed, solely on immutable characteristics, such as skin colour or having parents who migrated to Germany.

Drawing on personal experience, when I was growing up, the points of friction didn't seem to be about race. It was, I went to primary school in a small town in Southern Germany, quite provincial and parochial. Increasingly, we also got classmates from Turkey, later on also from the former Eastern Bloc and the Balkans: migrant kids, with what to my 'kid self' were unusual names, clothes and lunchbox contents. Their 'otherness' – perceived and actually existing – was mostly cultural/religious, and tied to behaviours, not essentialist markers of difference. It certainly was not about skin colour or other ethnic features. The idea seemed to be that a 'good migrant' is one that respects German society – in other words, there's room to adhere to respective religious customs and cultural practices, such as fasting at Ramadan and Eid celebrations, as long as it's done within the framework of German society.

How did we get to the current concept of 'structural racism' and the debates taking place in German discourse – the so-called 'Anti-Rassismus Debatte'?

Dr.K: In the context of migration, 'race' is mainly an imported concept from the United States. The chief problem stemming from this US-import is that the parameters of US history and society are transplanted to Germany, only the victims of racial oppression are adjusted to the German context, that is: black Americans are replaced by migrants, particularly non-European migrants. The latter are all seen as victims of a structurally racist society, in the same way, black Americans are seen as victims of racist structures in the United States. And in the same way that in the US research is condemned as racist that highlights that Afro-Americans who share aspirations, work ethics etc.

with their white peers have made great educational and occupational headway, research in Germany that shows that migrants who integrate or even assimilate are much more successful is labelled as racist.

The very idea of migrants being expected to socially and culturally adjust to the norms and values of the receiving society – in the current context of the 'anti-racism debate' – is being seen as oppressive, particularly, when such expectations are directed toward Muslims and/or 'people of colour'.

In contrast to Australia and other countries where nation-building required immigration, many of those engaged in the German 'anti-racism debate' have not accepted that you cannot succeed as a migrant without making adjustments and that for first-generation migrants it takes a while to do so, that it takes some time to find your feet and really compete on an equal level with the locally-born population. For most of us, it just takes a while. And, I guess, most migrants accept that too. They don't migrate and think you don't have to deal with any setbacks. They know and they accept that you have to put in the effort.

No doubt having to find your way and identity as a 'migrant-German' was filled with challenges –especially, when the expectation was to make yourself a worthy part of German society, to 'behave like a German'. Nuances between assimilation and integration weren't particularly well-articulated or even defined in official public discourse at that time. I guess, that's why we have comedies now about immigrants, integration and multiculturalism, to help make light of difficult experiences. As subsequent decades showed, the ideals of a multicultural, diverse society didn't hold up to reality. Could you explain some of the dynamics at play that led to what some have even called 'the failure of the multicultural project'?

Dr.K: In Germany, up until 1998, the federal political level claimed that "Germany is not a country of immigration." As they had for so long held on to that believe, no migrant-incorporation policies were developed. Moreover, they clung to the idea that those who in the 1960s and 70s had migrated as so-called 'guestworkers' would eventually return home. As long as that was the official line of thinking, there was no necessity to put any expectations on migrants and their offspring. Hence, regarding migrant-incorporation, Germany for decades was a 'laissez-faire-country'. That only changed in the late 1990s/early 2000s. On the local and state level as well as in academia, there were debates and initiative regarding how to incorporate migrants. One of the ideas was multiculturalism, but, in contrast to Australia, it has never become an official policy. When Germany turned to develop migrant-incorporation strategies in the early 2000s, they looked to other European countries, especially to

the Netherlands. An integrationist turn had taken place in the Netherlands in the late 1990s, which greatly informed German policy development. The Netherlands, like many other European countries at the time, realised that migrant youth was underperforming in the education and labour market systems, and that this would greatly impact the country's economic well-being in the future as well as the viability of its welfare system. So they started to develop programs to redress the educational and occupational attainment gaps. Germany followed suit. And they set up compulsory 'integration courses' and 'integration tests' for most immigrants from non-Western countries.

Additionally, policy development coincided with 9/11 and subsequent Islamist terror attacks, which made European countries view their Muslim populations with greater suspicion. In this climate of suspicion, multiculturalism wasn't seen as an appropriate concept, with then Chancellor Angela Merkel declaring in 2010: "Multiculturalism has failed, it has absolutely failed!" What she meant by that regarding Germany was that the laissez-faire-approach, which ultimately accepted cultural and religious separateness, had failed.

That Germany adopted policies that stemmed from the integrationist turn, didn't go down well with many on the left. They perceived the discourse about integration as a way to shift the blame for societal problems onto migrants. This made many of them double down on the notion of structural racism, with an ever stronger emphasis on problems being exclusively "the receiving society's fault". For example: When migrant children do not succeed in the education system, the only acceptable reason is that the system

had not got rid of its inherent racism. Instead of demanding migrants to adjust, they demand that the receiving society had to adjust to migrants and their needs, mostly by examining their structures for signs of racism. Like with all myopic approaches, there are consequential blind spots, first and foremost, the effect this approach has on migrant children. If, as a pupil, you learn that if you underachieve this is due to racist structures, you are likely to develop some sense of resentment towards those structures and the people who created them, and even more importantly, it locks people into inertia, because if the structures are responsible for it all, it's natural to think "Why should I make an effort?".

This is about making migration society work, with the very real societal tensions that come from managing 'diversity' in democracies – which is not about race or skin colour per se, but the friction of navigating cultural difference/ hegemonic culture, values, identity and belonging.

How did narratives of race and whiteness come into this then?

Dr.K: German academics have imported the tenets of Critical Race Theory (CRT) and applied it to the German context, where, on account of a very different history, the empirical flaws of CRT are even starker than in the U.S. To illustrate this point: African-Americans were legally – hence systemically – discriminated against on the basis of their skin colour. What's more, they did not migrate to the United States on their own volition. In contrast, migrants have come to Germany on their own volition.

That doesn't mean migrants have not encountered racism in the Federal Republic of Germany, but it has not been legally proscribed. To make the CRT concept work in Germany, skin colour and other physical traits had to be divorced from racism. That gave birth to 'Critical Whiteness Studies', which deem everyone as a PoC (Person of Color), and, thereby, an underprivileged or oppressed person, who belongs to a minority group whose demographic make-up is not statistically represented in specific areas of society, mainly the higher echelons. By now, among the proponents of CRT and its 'offspring' studies, such as 'Critical Whiteness', the existence and pervasiveness of 'structural racism' has become an unquestionable truth.

Non-migrants are required to examine all their actions for unconscious biases, all their societal structures for traces of racism and – to boot – they are confronted with the demand to accept preferential treatment for everyone who is termed a "person of migrant background" (i.e. everyone who has a parent that was born in another country or who was born in Germany but did not acquire German citizenship by birth). If you want your local population to be receptive to accept more migration, and that is what CRT-adherents want, then it does not appear to be a good idea to ask non-migrants to forgo all kinds of opportunities in relation to study opportunities, jobs, parliamentary seats etc.

So, you are saying as postcolonial theories became more and more dominant, they got applied fairly indiscriminately, which means we end up with oversimplified assumptions?

Dr.K: The most compelling assumption is: "the West colonised the rest of the world and justified this by applying racist narratives. In the process it has divided the world into oppressors and the oppressed." This part is largely correct. The next part, however, is oversimplified:

'Since refugees mostly originate from 'the rest', they are automatically considered victims of the racist and oppressive West" by the proponents of postcolonial theory. Colonialism, and the racist notions it was built on and spawned respectively, is equated to an original sin, which the West can never rid itself of. It will forever have to try and make amends for it.

It's also important to highlight that there has been a shift in how we determine what classifies as 'racism': it is the purview of those who are or feel affected by racism to define what is racist, dispassionate judgements or views from 'outside' observers aren't allowed to factor in as much.

The key point is that we should still be able to distinguish and not subsume all of this by indiscriminately subscribing to imported notions of structural discrimination and violence.
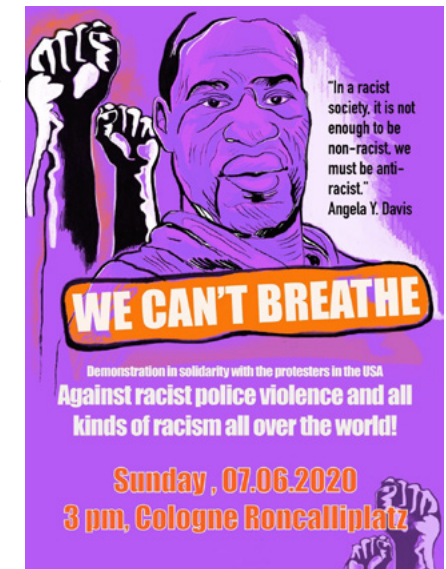

Image Source: Migrantifa NRW Twitter Account, https://x.com/migrantifanrw/status/12678190478 66920960?s=46&t=tYIbtQyY9KmSml5- YZTWuA.

A DIFFERENTIATED LENS: INSIGHTS FROM A RECENT NEW ZEALAND STUDY

"Racism in Aotearoa New Zealand has been increasingly under the spotlight in recent years. The 2019 Christchurch mosque attacks amplified conversations about racial equality that continued in the wake of the Black Lives Matter protests. But racism is a complicated topic and not all minorities experience it in the same way or to the same extent. As our recent research found, financial wealth and a person's ability to "pass" as white can have a significant impact on how they experience racism. This challenges the conventional wisdom that systemic and interpersonal racism affects all minorities equally. Recently, the government and other agencies have explicitly prioritised efforts to address racism. In 2022, the government launched the National Action Plan Against Racism, which is committed to progressively eliminating racism in all its forms. But there is lack of agreement on what racism looks like, and consequently what constitutes effective anti-racism action. In part, this is because racism is largely still defined by histories of colonisation, although societies like New Zealand have transformed socially, culturally and demographically...

[In our research], we argued against the assumption that all ethnic youth are equally discriminated against based solely on their ethnicity. This oversimplifies the experience of racism."

Sonia Lewycka, Rachel Simon-Kumar & Roshini Peiris-John, December 2022.[3]

Is this the impact of Critical Race Theory (CRT)?

Dr.K: Yes, in Germany, a lot of academics looked to what was happening at Ivy League campuses in the United States, CRT originated at Harvard. And this intellectual leadership is one of the main reasons why it spread all over the world, because everyone was like *"Oh, what is happening at Harvard? We've got to emulate that."* And they've taken that theory and transplanted it into the German context without adapting it. So, in this system, German migrants are now basically African-Americans.

This way, and coming back to the structural turn, we see how over time the actual markers for statistical imparity became less and less important: For example, if you want to investigate the claim migrant children don't succeed in schools in an equal way with non-migrant children, you have to employ a finer-grained lens on social and socioeconomic background, and remember it's also very context and time-specific. When you do that, in Germany, you could, for example, see that Greek children were on average more successful in the education system than Italian children. When looking just at Muslim migrant groups, Iranian children are much more successful than Turkish children. But when you compare children of Turkish descent to children of German descent **in the same socioeconomic group**, children of Turkish descent are more successful than the ones of German descent.

So, for the claim of structural racism to be empirically valid, you would really need to narrow it down and critically examine statistical parities and imparities.

But that has been subverted now, this idea of the role structures play, because Critical Race Theory (CRT) has taken over the original idea of the impact of structures on people's ability to get through the education system and get certain occupational positions.

The CRT version of structures, and particularly structural racism, is a much more indiscriminate lens, by design, and with very strong moral underpinnings. Basically, it divides society into the privileged and the underprivileged.

The empirical evidence is against CRT as a wholesale explanation, but it's been successfully employed as an overarching lens. So, you are either on one side or the other side, and there's no way to cross, because it is an immutable characteristic – or immutable characteristics when the intersectional view is applied –, you're born with it.

So, what happens if a member of the perceived underprivileged group does the criticizing? Especially, when they do well in society, despite obstacles?

Dr.K: Drawing on the U.S. experience shows quite clearly what happens in such cases: successful African-Americans, especially from the 1980s onwards, have been accused of 'acting white'. Those who have challenged CRT tenets have been denigrated with the charge of displaying 'Uncle-Tom-behaviour'. Both is seen as a reprehensive betrayal of the African-American population as a whole. You are seen as someone who wants to let the white of the hook, which betrays the theory, too, which has it that when you underachieve, the only reason for that is because the structures built by whites are against you. The 'science' goes that you can never really be an achiever, as long as those structures are in place.

Many CRT academics are also activists and apply their theories to practice, by acting on behalf of 'the oppressed of the earth'. They put forward an agenda that calls for equality of outcomes between those whom they label as perpetrators or victims of racial oppression.

So by being successful, you falsify the theory. And the more people are successful, the more the theory is falsified. Ultimately, it becomes untenable. It's untenable in the first place, but you've got to hide that by smearing the reputation of everyone who dares to point that out by furnishing empirical data. It's completely unscientific.

Could we unpack this phenomenon of equating success with 'acting white' some more: within the CRT line of reasoning, what explanation is applied when 'white people' are not performing well? They obviously are not seen as having the same obstacles as non-whites or non-migrants?

Dr.K: There are striking double-standards when it comes to who or what is the cause for individual achievement. If non-migrants, especially those from an academic background, underachieve, the system and its structures are not regarded as the cause for this. If the same happens to a migrant, structures are perceived as the principal reason. Now, as I said before, structures affect people differently, and it is, for example, true that having parents who are academics makes it easier for pupils to navigate the education system successfully, but this is only statistically true, which means there are substantial individual variations among groups. Moreover, there are other factors that determine educational outcomes, first and foremost the amount of work an individual is prepared to put into getting ahead.

In other words: individual agency matters greatly, yet it is the very factor that is completely denied by CRT proponents, as it does not fit their narrative that says that the only thing that matters is whether you are regarded as a member of a privileged or underprivileged group.

What are the consequences of this dynamic becoming more prominent?

Dr.K: CRT has not only taken hold outside academia on account of university graduates applying that theory to their workplaces, but it has also spread to a wide variety of countries around the globe, chiefly Western countries, where it resonated with many who feel guilty about the West's colonial past. Apart from all the flaws and the ideological underpinnings of the theory, there is one particular dynamic that has had quite an impact on the larger society. That is the tactics of character assassination, which

replaces the need to argue your point with a moral onslaught directed at the person who challenges the theory. The moral onslaught serves to overwhelm someone, make others turn their back on that person out of fear to become the next target of the character assassins. It is designed to make people shy away from even looking at whether the tenets of Critical Race Theory hold water or not. Typically, 'dissidents' and 'non-believers' are labelled racists, Islamophobes. Everything they say or write is closely examined to find something that can be construed as racist so that they can be stigmatised. In case nothing can be construed that way, the mere fact that someone challenges the theory suffices to deem them racist.

What's more, Critical Race Theory has also changed the notion of equality. Before, the goal has always been equality of opportunity. That is in line with a liberal society. But now through critical race theory, it has been shifted to equality of outcomes. That is never achievable, and this is the very purpose for stating that only equality of outcomes signifies a society that has overcome its deeply ingrained racism. Yet, if a goal is unattainable, people will get frustrated, with some advancing ever more radical demands about the societal changes necessary to achieve that goal after all.

So, it's just assumed that a claim or an accusation of racism is morally superior to the extent that it's beyond reproach and doesn't need further empirical validation? Then we have a concept that is not really tangible, doesn't necessarily need to be backed by data, and it can basically break up a debate before it even starts, because you can just label someone you don't agree with as racist?

Dr.K: That is how it works. For example, if someone claims, "That remark was racist to me", it is to be seen as racist. And if you challenge that, it's a further sign of you being a racist. You can't do anything about your privilege. You're born with it, because you're born to German parents, you are of German origin, the equivalent to skin colour in Germany, you can't help that. So it can become a circular argument without a real way out.

I see this manifested in a tendency towards a sort of aggregated 'complex of white guilt,' where *we* – as in, Western democratic nations – have to collectively atone for 'white guilt'. This way, you end up in a place where so-called descendants of the perpetrators have to show time and again that they are not racist, and they have to make space for the descendants of victims. We can see these dynamics play out in Germany. It can end up that whoever criticizes the views of the subscribers of Critical Race Theory and structural racism can become the target of character assassination. This way, your identity is tied back to biological characteristic of 'whiteness' vs 'PoC', regardless – which, ironically, is the very definition of racism.

Women's Honi

Their tears fall strategically, the flow of a stream that serves the sole purpose of drowning you (and their guilt) out. In their watery eyes, they are excused from the reality that despite being subject to patriarchal injustice, they too are adherents and inflictors of oppression. Their tears pool together, cold and saline, as if to form an ocean on which to carry the police boats they seem to love so much. They adopt their role of policing our behaviour — a violent and punishing tactic built on the comfortable complacency enabled by the system of white supremacy they refuse to unlearn. [5]

Image Source: Webpage of the University of Sydney's student newspaper 'Honi Soit', https://honisoit.com/2020/04/dear-white-women-your-tears-wont-drown-your-guilt/

I describe and discuss this in one of my books, where I use the term **redemption racism**, because it's about showing that you've redeemed yourself from your ancestors' racism:

"they take a very self-centered approach since their main concern is to demonstrate that they have overcome the 'original sin of the West': racism. They construe criticism of non-Western cultural or religions practices first and foremost as racist, since it may cast doubt on the level of redemption they have achieved. A corollary of this is that they don't judge people's behaviour by the same standards, meaning that a much lower standard is applied to non-Westerners."[6]

And even if it's got nothing to do with skin colour anymore, it is still brought back into it? Can you please explain this dynamic in more detail?

Dr.K: When Kimberlé Crenshaw at Harvard first came up with CRT, she wanted to reform the system. That was in the 1980s. By now, the focus of many younger CRT adherents has shifted from reforming the system to dismantling it. They justify this shift by reasoning: "*Well, we've tried to reform the system for 40 years. We haven't managed. Despite decades of effort through CRT, we haven't managed, so the only solution is to completely scrap those structures and build up a new system.*"

Image Source: Webpage of the University of Sydney's student newspaper 'Honi Soit', https://honisoit.com/2023/08/snowflakes-on-being-white-and-fragile/.

That new system would most likely be one that privileges those deemed under-privileged by design, while including ex-clusionary measures for those regarded as privileged. That would be the resur-rection of the GDR system, where, for example, children of farmers and workers were given preferential access to tertiary education. This time round, access would not be based on social background but on privilege stemming from an immutable characteristic.

The more people buy into this belief, the more resentment is being bred between them. People tend to resent those they believe prevent them from getting ahead. Equally, people resent being seen, simply on account of them having white or German parents, as responsible for other people's place in society. This is an inevi-table outcome, when you do not view and treat people as individuals, but only as members of a group.

So it's coming back to that dangerous mantra of 'there are no political solu-tions' – which is the territory of extrem-ism, because it's not trying to work within the system and reform it, but by tearing down the existing order?

Dr.K: Exactly. Unattainable goals lend themselves to radicalisation. And you see this in some parts in Germany with, for example, the 'Migrantifa'. This is an Antifa group, which focusses on migra-tion issues and the treatment of migrants, comprising migrants and their non-mi-grant 'allies' alike. You see similar radicali-sation tendencies among the 'Black Lives Matter' (BLM) movement in the United States. What drives radicalisation is that there is no way out, because if the struc-tures are deemed racist simply because they were built by non-migrant/whites, they would always privilege non-mi-grants/whites. The only way to get rid of this strucutral racism is to completely abolish and destroy the structures and build a new system.

MIGRANTIFA
In their own words

Image Source: Migrantifa North Rhine Westphalia Twitter Account, https://x.com/migrantifanrw/status/1520818317342167040?s=46&t=tYIbtQyY9KmSml5-YZTWuA.

Image Source: Migrantfa Berlin Twitter Account, https://x.com/bemigrantifa/status/1358865700794871809?s=46&t=tYIbtQyY9KmSml5-YZTWuA.

Image Source: Migrantifa Rhineland Palatinate Twitter Account, https://x.com/migrantifanrw/status/1258480149835722755?s=46&t=tYIbtQyY9KmSml5-YZTWuA.

Note

The Hanau attack served as the cata-lyst for the formation of 'Migrantifa'. According to members, the slogan and hashtag 'Hanau is everywhere' (Hanau ist kein Einzelfall) is employed in re-sponse to "politicians and authorities speaking of Hanauas an 'isolated case'."

THE POLITICS OF ANGER, RAGE… EVEN HATE?

In her book Hass: Von der Macht eines widerständigen Gefühls ('Hate: On the Power of a Defiant Emotion'), the German writer Şeyda Kurt delves into political applications of hate — from an anti-racist and feminist perspective. She makes the case for hate's potential as an instrumental tool for "*Black people, racialised people, Jewish people, poor people and workers, queer people, feminised people and people of other marginalised genders. Revolutionaries. Fighters in liberation and class struggles.*"
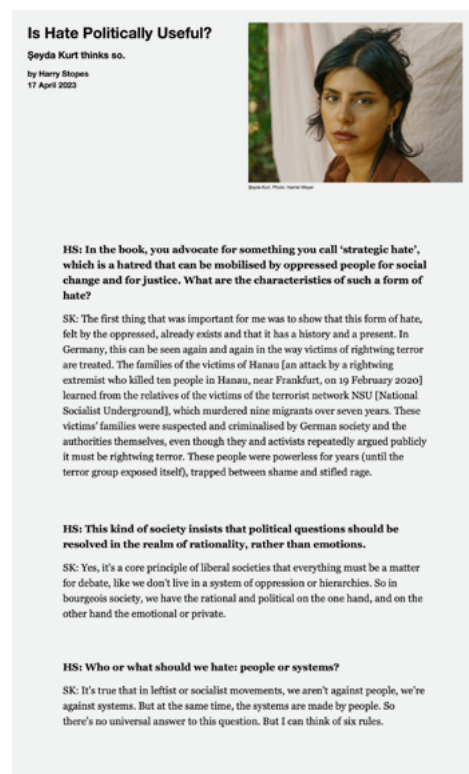
Image Source: Interview with Şeyda Kurt on the website Novara media, https://novaramedia.com/2023/04/17/is-hate-politically-useful.

Image source: Interview with Migrantifa members, https://refugeworldwide.com/news/migrantifa-berlin-everyone-has-a-political-consciousness.
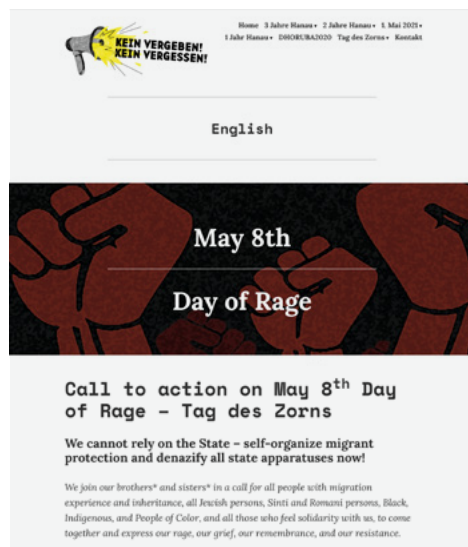
Image Source: Migrantifa Berlin Website website, https://migrantifaberlin.wordpress.com/english/.

How can we resolve this issue in order to move forward? How can we reclaim that space for having frank but civil debates?

Dr.K: This ship is far out of the harbor, but it hasn't completely reached the ocean. I think you have pushback now because ever more people have come to realise that this is not just some ideological talk academia engages in but that it has spilled over into society and is affecting their lives. Additionally, the demands are growing ever more absurd, being so over the top that people are fed up with it.

Concerning academia, it is of the utmost importance that we defend academic freedom, as a right that applies to every individual. In Germany, this right is even enshrined in Article 5 of the country's constitution. Everyone needs to be able to pose research questions, present their research findings, argue their point, without having to be afraid of professional consequences, such as being unable to find a publisher for one's academic work, not because it is academically lacking, but because publishers fear to become the target of a smear campaign when they publish ideologically inconvenient research. First and foremost, we have to push back against the trend where instead of engaging with an argument, you attack the person presenting it by trying to destroy their social reputation.

Of course, academics and students can hold political views and even ideologies, but they need to be open to have them falsified or verified. Otherwise, it gets nasty very quickly, if it gets personal. By pointing out what is wrong with specific arguments or points, showing the evidence for it. It is important to clearly distinguish: "this is supported by facts. That is not supported by facts." And if the evidence isn't there, if you're in love with a theory but the evidence doesn't support it, you need to say goodbye to the theory you love, and not to try to hold onto it by ignoring or twisting evidence or engaging in moral relativism. So, in other words, get the science back in, push the ideology out. And do this time and again, and time and again.

'APPLAUSE FROM THE WRONG SIDE'?

In Germany, 'applause from the wrong side' has been established as an admonishing phrase in recent years, to avoid debates on inconvenient topics, such as migration-related issues. 'Applause from the wrong side' means that right-wingers might approve of something someone says, even if that person didn't come from a right-wing perspective. But this can develop into an unhealthy mechanism, when people will refrain from naming facts or making arguments, because the 'wrong side' might approve of the point and instrumentalize it. This way, the fear of receiving 'applause from the wrong side' has become a powerful tool, with many rather biting their tongue than running the risk of being accused of fostering right-wing agendas. I've observed this frequently when I openly address migration-related problems during public talks or panel discussions. Reliably, someone in the audience says, 'I think it's very good that you're bringing that up, but you know that the AfD says that, too.' To which I always reply, 'What you just said makes me conclude that you allow the AfD to dictate what you think and say.' This is always indignantly rejected with the words, 'No, I don't!' To which I reply: 'That is exactly what you do when you point out that the AfD says this as well. By saying that, you are giving the AfD the sole power over what can be said and thought in this country by 'respectable' citizens."[7]

And in non-academic spaces? In Australia, some might be thinking of the public discussion space following the 'Indigenous Voice to Parliament' referendum?

Dr.K: The argument is basically the same in the policy-making arena, such as discussions with practitioners. We can't let the fear of being labelled a right-winger shape and harm our public and political discourse. Racism claims can stifle some of the very debates we should engage in. For example, when practitioners, such as social workers or teachers, bring up problems they experience with some migrants, this includes values and attitudes, which can be 'culture-driven'. And especially practitioners who have first-hand experience with problems, they need the assurance that they can talk freely about them. Informing them that the root-cause of all problems is structural racism, is not helpful. The key point is that if the problems are not identified realistically and addressed head-on in political and public debate, then the right-wing populists can profit from it even more.

AGAINST FEAR

"A minority of Germans fear migrants, particularly those from Islamic countries. They are afraid of cultural change and of having to share housing and other scarce resources. Often their fear leads them to follow demagogues of the far right who promise to guard Germany against being 'swamped' by 'waves' of foreigners who don't speak German, don't look German and don't value German cultural practices. Others, possibly the majority, fear far-right extremists, right-wing populists and whatever other forces are out there exploiting the fear of non-white or Muslim others; but out of fear they sometimes condone demands put forward by those same right-wing populists[...]. The fears that are being instrumentalised by the AfD are not unique. Nor is the AfD [...] What distinguishes Germany is that the fears providing oxygen to the far right are less significant than the fears of people who are afraid of the far right[...]."

Klaus Neumann "The Fall and Rise of German Angst", *Inside Story*, **April 2019.**[8]

Ideologues have only been able to be as successful as they are right now because the majority of the population have allowed them to be that way.

So we have to find the wisdom and courage to point things out that are factually untrue. Or that are problematic. Especially those that can deeply hurt society, because not addressing issues only intensifies problems and it breeds resentment. You can't expect change within five minutes. The so-called 'long march through the institutions' has taken a few decades. It is now deeply embedded in the system, which means that it will take time to push back the negative aspects of it.

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5. 'Honi Soit' is the weekly student newspaper of the University of Sydney. It is premised on a framing of the modern nation of Australia as illegitimate: so-called 'Australia' (in quotation marks), along all its institutions, including the University itself, are described as a 'settlercolonial project': "We remain cognisant that Honi's writers and readership are predominantly made up of settlers…" "Colonialism is not a one-time event that occurred in the distant past; it is an ongoing structure. The genocide of First Nations people is perpetuated and enabled by the government [today]."

6. https://hillauer.de/en/2021/05/03/discourse-club-racism-and-womens-rights/

7. 'Using racism claims to stifle debates on women's rights', an interview with Dr Kostner by German journalist Rebecca Hillauer, 2021. https://hillauer.de/en/2021/05/03/discourse-club-racism-and-womens-rights/

8. https://insidestory.org.au/the-fall-and-rise-of-german-angst/

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