

Racism

Aleo Susan Arndt

Racism has invented 'human races'. To be more precise: White people have invented 'races' to implement racism as a sword and shield of colonialism, global economic exploitation, and *white* supremacist nationalism. This dates back to antiquity, while still affecting every single pore of global societal dynamics till date.

Throughout the centuries, the *white* architects of racism held different opinions about how to map 'races' and, somewhat consequentially, how many thereof do exist. Yet, there was one agreement that was always reproduced and never detested by them, because this claim is the sole goal of racism: to claim white superiority. Designed to grant power and privileges to *white* people, racism and its theories of "race" always boil down to holding that there are several "races" and that only one of them represents fully fledged humanity, hence being superior to all others—and this was the 'white race'. In other words, racism does not just violate People of Color, *white* people also want to feel right about this.

The claim that all other 'races' would lack full humanity is constructed by racism as a permission, and even obligation, that the 'white race' has to tame, civilise, erase those they construct as their "Other"—even by means that would not be accepted when brought upon white people (somewhat arguing: those, who are not fully human, would not be eligible to be treated in a human way). This narrative turned the actual motivation of conquering other continents and stealing respective territories, resources, and human lives, i.e. the economic greed and greed for power, and therefore committing major crimes like murder, torture, rape, and genocide in the process, upside down. Europe kept disguising its economic interests and the blunt violence to feed that greed, by claiming that white people are superior and hence "obliged" to missionize, civilize or erase other "races," because these were not fully human. In fact, how-

ever, *white* people, driven by their greed for accumulation and power, were the ones who violated and lost what it means to be human.

This is why racism is ‘white supremacy’. Because racism is a *white* power structure that makes sure that *white* people stay in power by keeping *white* spaces *white* and while pampering *white* people with privileges—like a privileged access to economic resources, belonging or rights (even of violating others). Those who cannot access *white* power structures and privileges and who, even worse, are the ones to pay the price (even literally, in as much as *white* supremacists forced them into unpaid labor, for example), experience this as oppression, exploitation, and discrimination. This is neither an opinion nor about sensitivity that feeds into identity. This is about structural racism that positions each and everyone on this planet, granting power and access to privileges or not. While those who are discriminated against by racism cannot but know this, one of the many *white* privileges is to even not be aware thereof and to even declare racism to be People of Color’s problem only. While any belief in the existence of ‘human races’ is a racist one, racism has been shaping the world radically and lastingly. Therefore, a “racial turn” is needed that denies the existence of ‘race’ as a biological category, while denominating *race* (in italics) as major pillar for structural racism. This is addressed, for example, when speaking of *white(ness)* (in italics), Blackness, or People of Color.

Since antiquity, European conceptions of freedom and democracy have been deeply intertwined with exclusivity—reserved primarily for financially privileged men. Initially idealized through the figures of Greek and Roman citizens, this notion later evolved into a framework centered on *white* Christian cis-men. At its core, the underlying argument—though logically flawed—was starkly consistent: only Greek, Roman, and subsequently *white* Christian men were deemed capable of reason and thus the only ones to represent culture. All other human beings were rather close to “nature” and hence destined to be ruled. Yet, the more culture, the more superior; and the more nature, the more inferior and hence to be tamed. All constructed as nature—including all women, non-Christians, People of Color, and non-heteronormative subjects—were systematically associated with emotion and irrationality and thus the absence of reason and progress. Consequently, they were positioned as inherently unfit for autonomy and as being in need of male (*white* Christian) governance. This formula was meant to entitle *white* Greek/Christian man to being morally obligated to govern the world according to their own interests. And it was projected onto human bodies. The effects were far-reaching: women were denied political participation, queerness was pathologized and

criminalized, while racism was made, ordered by European, North American and colonialist law, a structuring principle of both domestic orders and attitudes of globalization. These implementations of injustice were not just mere accidents of Western democracy. Rather, they were foundational to its inauguration. This hierarchical model was inscribed into global and local social orders and institutionalized through institutions of dominations. European laws did not only not criminalize racism. They allowed and ordered racist violation of People of Color's rights.

To make this work ideologically and to translate this world-making into word-making, 'races' were narrated. To do so, bodily differences were invented by constructing 'skin color', mapping skeletons and skulls, categorising blood and gens, while locating thus constructed collective bodies in certain spaces and religions. Thus, 'race' has always been closely intertwined with body, religion and geographical place. This evolved in a total of six phases to date, while spreading out into the overlapping and yet distinct modes of antisemitism, anti-Black racism, orientalist and anti-Muslim racism, anticiganism and anti-Indigenous racism. Any of such strands of racism was affecting different spaces and times differently, again in given dis*continuities of the following six phases.

Phase I: Theological Foundations of Colonialism: The Era of 'Skin Color'

The first phase of racism began in early modern Europe, very much designed as a theological theorizations of 'race'. When colonially conquering other continents and stealing respective territories, resources and human lives; while committing major crimes like murder, torture, rape, and genocide in the process, Europe kept disguising its economic interests and the blunt violence, by claiming its superiority and the obligation of having been given the task (by the Christian God) to missionize, civilize, or erase other 'races'. This construct was simultaneously also employed for racist discrimination within Europe. 1492 is a major caesura with respect to this.

After many centuries of war and conflicts between Muslim and Catholic societies, in 1492 Queen Isabella eventually managed to win over Emir Muhammad XII of Granada – the Emir of the Emirate of Granada. Violating the peace contract, the Catholic crown started to put high taxes on the Muslim—and Jewish—population and confiscated their properties, eventually also expelling

Jewish and Muslim populations from the Iberian Peninsula. This was accompanied by racist decrees. And just as much as the wealth expropriated from these expulsions funded the conquest of the Americas and other colonial ventures, the racism informing the decrees against Jews and Muslims correlated with the emergent Indigenous racism. Of course, people do not leave their homes voluntarily or give their resources or territories to intruders. To expel Jews and Muslims and to steal resources from Indigenous Peoples, Christian Europe needed to employ blunt violence. To not just do so, but to also feel legitimated by God and law (in given intersections), Christian authorities convened councils like the Disputation of Valladolid (1550–51), designed to conclude that Indigenous peoples were not fully human but ‘part of nature’ and, as such, not entitled to own land and rights, but to be tamed and cultivated (just like their land) by Christian rule. And this centring of Christianity as well as the claim that Europe has to be Christian only, also was to legitimate the racism against Jews and Muslims in all across Europe.

Non-Christians were not simply excluded—they were Othered into being ontologically inferior. And this comprised the claim that they have to be baptized to become better human beings, while claiming that they can never be fully Christian, i.e. human—no matter the efforts of the ‘only true’, namely *white*, Christian efforts. The logic of missionary violence emerged here: to dominate others not despite Christian ethics, but because of it. Salvation became indistinguishable from conquest.

In this early phase of racism, ‘race’ constructions were first and foremost drawn from mapping “skin color.” “Skin color” of course, does not exist like this. When racism speaks of “skin color,” this is a racist abstraction (no human being is white or black), coded by the Christian colour symbolism that had already implanted the narrative of ‘white’ meaning good, virtue, beautiful, god-like; and ‘black’ meaning evil, monstrosity, evil, and devilish.

Moreover, climate theories that have been narrated ever since Antiquity played into this model, holding that an intensely hot climate burns skin just as much as hair and brains. This claim has informed the Greek term for all Africans (minus Egypt), i.e.

Aithiopier. Derived etymologically from Greek *aethio* “I burn” and [*ops*] “face,” i.e. “burnt face,” the Greek idea of humans being ‘black’ has always been about being burned and intellectually drained. This racist ideologeme also informs another Greek term for Africans, namely the term Black, i.e. “μαυρο” or “mavro.” Transferring it onto Africans and African-diasporic people, the

m-word—just as the later (Portuguese) word for Black, i.e. the ‘n-word,’ was derogative and deeply embedded in ideas of “race” (Arndt 118–125).

Phase II: Enlightenment and the Codification of ‘Race’

During Enlightenment, racism turned into its second phase. On the one hand, Enlightenment was into overcoming theocentrism and implementing secularization, while proclaiming equality and freedom as core goals of emergent democracy and modernism. Yet, the Maafa (European enslavement of Africans) had fuelled Europe’s Industrial Revolution and the Enlightenment at large did not mind this. Even though abolitionism was accelerated in Enlightenment (it started, when the first Black person was enslaved, because they did not agree), the *white* abolitionism did not question “race theories”. To the contrary, the majority of protagonists of Enlightenment, especially in Germany, were in favor of the Maafa and thus invested into developing new “race theories” in a pseudoscientific way.

Enlightenment philosophers like David Hume (1748) or Immanuel Kant (1764, 1775, 1781, 1798) were key figures in the theorization of ‘race’. In doing so, they still argued along the pattern of “skin-color”-constructions—now mapping four, namely “white”, “black”, “red”, and “yellow”. Yet, constructions of “skin color” were very much theologically coded and, moreover, originally designed by climate theories that would link hot climate to inferiority. With *white* people now living in the colonial space, this logics did not help to claim the superiority of whiteness. This explains why the Enlightenment’s complemented “skin-color”-constructions with skeleton and skulls as new major prisms of mapping “races”.

In doing so, they argued that Black people have no capacity to speak, to progress, to know, to create arts, to mould history, and hence are rightfully enslaved (Kant 4: 253). The Enlightenment’s ideas of freedom, equality, and democracy were *white* supremacist brotherhood islands in a very literal sense. The Enlightenment insisted that freedom and equality, voting rights and the right to be protected by the law, were privileges of *white* Christian men only—and that these were right because all other genders and ‘races’ would be closer to “nature” and hence not fully human. What is more, laws explicitly allowed the violation of colonized and enslaved people. Thus tuned, Enlightenment framed its violation of the world as doing them a favor—claiming it

were the duty and burden of *white* men to “civilize” those that were not capable thereof. Even though this was doomed to failure.

Phase III: Nationalism, Eugenics, and the Radicalization of “Race Theories”

In the 19th century, colonialism accelerated into imperialism and modern nation-states emerged. Imperialism adjusted racism to its needs, and so did the emergent nation-states’ nationalism. This synthesis of ‘race’ and ‘nation/alism’ is absorbed by the German term for people, “Volk.” Unlike the French term “les people,” it does not mean “all.” Rather, “Volk” is about the ‘race’ of the German nation.

New developments in other sciences, such as Darwinism or Genetics impacted the theorizing of ‘race.’ For one thing, acknowledging the impossibility to map ‘race’ along “skeleton” or “skulls,” now blood and the “invisible” genes were added as seemingly perfect means to claim populistically (i.e. lyingly and without being easily caught for it) that gens determine and carry ‘race’.

For another, Darwin’s idea of the “survival of the fittest” (1874) was, amongst others by his cousin Francis Galton (1892), translated into Social Darwinism that argued that higher classes have to fight ‘races’, accordingly, have to fight lower ‘races’ so as to prevent the “white race” from degeneration. Richard Stewart Chamberlain in his *“Die Grundlagen des XIX. Jahrhunderts”* (1899) argued that most *white* nations had already been “degenerated,” yet the “deutsche Volk”—the Aryans—were still most pure and hence most to be protected.

This new design of ‘race theories’ culminated in the rise of eugenics and racial hygiene, taking shapes in the colonies and respective racist law against Romani people in Europe. National Socialism, however, accelerated eugenics into laws (“Nürnberger Gesetze”) that were to bereft Jews and Roma, as well as many other people of their civic rights and eventually ordered the sterilization and deportation of Jewish and Romani people as well as of homosexual people—accelerating into the Shoah, the Porajmos, and the mass murder of Slavic peoples.

Phase IV: Denial, Evasion, and Continuities

After the defeat of National Socialism racism was far from gone. It was still serving as sword and shield of late colonialism and its wars against the resistance movements on all continents. Moreover, nations built from *white* settler colonies kept using racism as well as tools of segregation. The Apartheid South Africa and the Jim Crow era in the US are just the tip of the iceberg thereof. After all, all European nation states kept insisting on whiteness as norm/ality—while discriminating against People of color who are most commonly called “migrants,” irrespective of their state of citizenship. What is new, though, is that *white* societies—largely shocked from National Socialism’s rather than colonialism’s atrocities—did not feel comfortable with overt racism any more. This led to a turn towards “evasion” often also called “colour blindness.” Many *white* people in the Global North opted for the seemingly “liberal” gesture to not see ‘race’ (Morrison 9–10). This, however, did mean first and foremost to not speak about one’s own whiteness and the ways in which racism grants power and privilege to white people. It meant not to speak about racism.

But where racism is not addressed, it cannot be overcome. And it wasn’t. While whiteness thus was turned into an unmarked marker of norm/ality (Frankenberg 5), it kept *white* privileges alive, while discriminating against People of Color in terms of law (e.g. racial profiling), belonging and representation—from who is holding powerful positions in all sorts of branches to who is narrated in media, school books, or the arts versus who is silenced. The idea of European or North American nation state was still heavily loaded with the claim that it was *white* and Christian only. It is true.

After many centuries of the law advocating racism, ever since the late 20th century, Europe (similar to North America, South Africa, or Australia) also issued laws that are to prevent racism. But they have not been as effective as they should be. The fortress Europe policy has been eager to prevent migrants from coming to Europe, while also treating all People of Color (irrespective of their passport) as “foreign” to the white nation states. And in the midst of evasion, structural racism was rather repudiated than addressed.

In Germany, this new trend saw, from the early 2000s onwards, the emergence of buzz-words like “bunte Republik” that celebrates “diversity” without taking ongoing power constellations seriously. Schools and universities headed to claim themselves as “Schule ohne Rassismus” or “weltoffene Hochschule” without bothering to look into the impact of structural racism.

The University of Bayreuth is not any different here. The head of the University likes to celebrate its African Studies Centre as “diversity,” while being resistant to implementing the monitoring and naming of racism. For a very long time, to name racism was branded as damaging the university’s reputation. It was due to the shift brought about by Rüdiger Seesemann and his team that, eventually, an Anti-Racist Committee was founded that, after some years of interventional work, will be integrated into the official universitarian structures—and thus enables to start the work from monitoring racism, offering trainings for *white* people and empowerment measurements for People of Color. Because only where racism is addressed, and white persons take their respective responsibilities seriously, can People of Color somewhat trust the institution to actually fight racism.

Phase V: Fascist Resurgence and the Crisis of the Present

After many centuries of overt racism and some tiny decades of evading to address it, we are now in racism’s fifth phase. Fascism has returned to being loud and shameless. Right-wing extremist parties and intellectuals overtly demand a return to *white* supremacy’s prime narrative that ‘higher races’ have to fight the ‘lower ones’ and that the ‘white race’ has to be prevented from being degenerated. Remigration and Ethnopluralism, both being core terms of the German fascist party AfD as founded in 2016, are propagating that each “Volk” has to stay in the territories that Europe has in mind for them, which first and foremost means that Germany and Europe belong to *white* people with Christian socialization patterns only. That such parties exist is but part of the problem. That they are elected, by up to a third of the population, is an even more severe challenge. Most devastating though is that all other parties, and particularly the CDU/CSU that has always run the Bavarian government, are openly holding and defending racist positions—while rebuilding anti-discrimination policies and laws as well as the asylum-law that Germany had signed on as a lesson learnt and responsibility taken from National Socialism.

Germany’s contemporary chancellor, Friedrich Merz, has praised one of the most eugenic books after 1945, Thilo Sarrazin’s “*Deutschland schafft sich ab*” (2010). It propagates late 19th century degenerative racism as landmark for Germany’s future. Merz also called the killing of Iranians by the Israeli government as “Drecksarbeit.” And while the AfD is using the parliamentary power to abolish anti-discrimination laws and gender-mainstreaming measurements,

conservative parties hasten to undo them, too. In 2024, the newly voted CSU parliament of Bavaria (Germany) ordered universities to rewrite all their documents to annul any ways of representing the existence of more than two genders.

I have been grateful that one of the finest *white* man allies of our time, Rüdiger Seesemann, has been my colleague and friend in these hard times of backlash. His awareness is one thing. But his determination to not let things be, to feel anger about discrimination and to have a unique gift of sharing healing empathy whenever needed make all the difference in times like these. You, dear Rüdiger, are the proof to this world that those in power can share it evenly, you are the hope needed to keep on resisting. After all, and we both know it: They rule the world, until they don't.

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