

Empathy as a Tool to Fight Racism's Necropolitics and Facism's Ignorance of Human Rights

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Racism is 'white supremacy.' *White* people have built structures of domination that constitute racism to ensure that *white* people stay in power. *White* people keep *white* spaces *white*. Racism therefore endows *white* people with privileges – with privileged access to economic resources, for example. Racism dominates and determines economic conditions and legal foundations for inequality. Racism also regulates privileged access to belonging and normality (Arndt, 2021, based on research and argumentations pillared on works of Albert Memmi, Aimé Césaire, Obioma Nnaemeka, Audre Lorde, Sarah Ahmed and African feminist interventions in general).

The fact that *white* people use racism to grant themselves privileges comes at the expense of those who are excluded as 'others.' As a consequence, exclusion, oppression and discrimination against People of Color is generated by racism. But racism does not only create this segregation. An essential core of racism is also to serve *white* people with the narrative that the privileges they enjoy at the expense of those othered are 'right' and 'just,' even in a moral sense. This includes the violence necessary to maintain racism's segregation. In doing so, racism scales being human, in order to declare that the 'white race' is the only 'one' that is 'fully human.' Accordingly, all strands of racism hold that People of Color lack fully fledged humanity. Accordingly, thus the toxic logics of racism, *white* people can treat People of Color differently than *white* people. Violating one's very own moral claims and legal structures is not to be considered as such, by simply claiming that those who are not 'fully human' are not entitled to be treated in a human way. Thus framed, *white* people's lack of humanity and human decency towards People of Color is not just disguised as 'legitimate,' but as even 'necessary' (Arndt, 2021).

Racist ideologies holds that it is "the white man's burden", as Rudyard Kipling (1899) puts it, to 'missionize' and 'civilize' People of Color, while knowing that, no matter how hard they are trying, People of Color will never be up to being even to the 'white race's' fully fledged superior humanity. This ideologeme was transferred into laws. That laws constitute morality and notions of rightfulness and norm/ality maybe one important factor as to why *white* people have felt right about the terror white supremacy was and is enforcing onto the globe. Laws legitimated the enslave-

ment of at least 18 millions of Africans for over four centuries between the early 16th and mid 18th century (Arndt, 2021). And while the law allowed to punish any person fighting for their lives with death, the throwing overboard of African people was only an illegal case if the insurance company would have been thus betrayed. While pretending to be the only ones capable of ‘reason’ and ‘progress’ as well as ‘freedom’ and ‘democracy,’ Europe or North America legislated that any endeavor of a colonized or enslaved person or collective to live in a free and self-determined way was to be punished with death penalty – by torture, lashes and otherwise. This was translated into laws with the effect that the majority of *white* people all over Europe or North America as well as in *white* settler regimes considered themselves as ‘rightful owners’ of a superior morality. Thus spiced, in late 19th century, racism radicalized into holding that the ‘white race’ had to fight other races so as to be able to ‘protect’ the alleged superiority of the ‘white race.’ Eventually, eugenics turned into a legally ordered euthanasia and colonial genocides escalated into the Shoa or Porajmos. When National Socialism was defeated, *white* supremacist segregation did not find an end. France and the United Kingdom kept fighting decolonial resistance, the Jim Crow Era continued to terrorize People of Color and the Apartheid regime was yet to radicalize. Within Europe, anti-Black racism, anticiganism or orientalist racism kept privileging *white* people, thus causing discrimination against People of Color both structurally and discursively, in terms of access to economic resources, education, access to legal rights as well as narrations about norm/ality and belonging (Arndt, 2021).

Years and decades after World War II, step by step, the resistance against racism eventually won a legal turn. The USA, Canada and Europe eventually entrusted themselves into laws that eventually outlawed racism. And while, to date, this has not resulted into a severe undoing of structural racism in terms of economy, law or representation, these very fragile anti-racist interventions are attacked by the return of fascism ever since the early 2000s. Fascist parties all over Europe and the USA have declared themselves as sword and shield of *white* supremacy, while engaging in a war of terror against People of Color both in Europe and North America as well as all across the globe. Yet they are but the tip of the iceberg. Even beyond the direct voters of fascist or far-right parties, the *white* mainstream society has returned to overtly ‘shit-talking’ about People of Color and countries in the Global South. A recent example is the German Chancellor Friedrich Merz labelling of “Iran” as “Drecksland”, “country of dirt” (Völkner, 2025).

Part and parcel of this return to racism is what Achille Mbembe (2019) calls “necropolitics.” Necropolitics describes how national and supranational governing bodies cherish the lives of human beings differently, while racism segregates between those whose lives are to be protected and mourned versus those that are less eligible to both. The Black-lives-matter-movement is about this. That Black lives do not matter equally. So, anyone who tries to transfer this slogan into something

like “All Lives Matter” would ignore the fact that *white* supremacy has a history of claiming and doing the exact opposite. In times of the *maafa* and colonialism, for example, murder and rape were considered to be crimes. At the same time, though, a *white* person murdering or raping a Black person would not have been sentenced. Because the law was not meant to protect Black bodies. These patterns have been very powerful, to present. One example is racial profiling and police brutality towards Black people. But white mainstream narratives keep the underlying discourse alive, too. To give an example: The first season of the TV-series “The Walking Dead” (Darabont et al., 2010), in episode 6, closes with the protagonists failed attempt to find shelter in the Pentagon. Eventually, the only scientist still alive offers all of them a sudden death. All but two of the women characters decide against it. One of the two characters is pleaded by the others to not give up that easily. Her leaving the Pentagon a second before the lethal explosion is to be read as the season's happy end. This happens while not speaking about the other woman character at all. She does not matter. Throughout the season, she has hardly spoken a word and has not been shown in being of any merit to the group. Sort of motivated by this, her death is not mentioned, and the happy end somewhat suggests that it does not matter, whether she is alive or dead. This woman character named Jacqui is Black, while the one who is confronted with arguments to not give up and thus talked into surviving is the *white* woman Andrea. The person who eventually convinces her to not give up is a *white* man – and at no point in the entire scene does he, Dale Horvath (and yes, he has, unlike the women characters, a surname), talk to or glance at Jacqui (as if he is making the point, “Who, the fuck is Jacqui?”).

This is a regular pattern. Blockbusters that narrate about global catastrophes are often way too ready to sacrifice the entire African continent to the meteorite, monster wave or the like in the film's early sequences. And when the happy ending is celebrated with highly emotive music, this catastrophe seemed to have been forgotten as not mattering at all.

Necropolitics is but a tool of racism's ideologeme that the privileged white crowd is ‘fully human’ while People of Color are not, thus making the latter less eligible to survival and the mourning of death. This same idea is also at work when the general slogan “Das Boot is voll” (The boat is full) is used as a metaphor to not feeling responsible to give asylum to refugeeed people. This, however, was not meant to be a worry about these people being under the threat to drown. The danger these people are in was abused into painting migration as a threat to Germany, while claiming that welcoming people fleeing from crisis would put Germany into a crisis instead. This attitude was echoed when, at demonstrations of the far-right movement PEGIDA (PEGIDA is an German acronym for ‘Patriotic Europeans against the Islamization of the ‘Abendland,’ with the latter being an orientalist term for Europe), in the early 2020s in Germany, people shouted “Absaufen! Absaufen!,” literally desiring that the people in such boats should drown.

Obviously, racism has been a mode of defaulted humanity and fascism is about the violation of humanity, human rights and being human, too. Throughout all centuries, racism worked as a sword that kills People of Color, while shielding the *white* murderers and their *white* contemporaries from feeling bad about it, holds an important message: Fascism cannot be fought with facts alone. Fascist politics as part of far-right politics rely on racist populism that offer *white* people simplistic solutions for complex problems that are also very much about feeling good about all atrocities that are part and parcel of populist fake solutions of ongoing problems.

To tell German society that the Industrial Revolution of the Global North was built by the resources and labor stolen by colonialism and that the respective century-long economic and demographic draining is responsible for many of the challenges African societies face today will hardly make any difference to most *white* Europeans. They have inhaled racist narrations about their own superiority so deeply, that they truly believe that it was this very superiority that explains why their countries are more rich and secure than others. And that it is the other people's inferiority that is responsible for the crises people suffer under. Rather than taking responsibility for the colonial violation of the world, *white* mainstream society is deeply upset about suggestions that colonialism needs to be remembered and met with reparations. Correspondingly, *white* mainstream societies feel totally disconnected from people being forced into fleeing their homes. They imagine it to be a crisis that some few percent of the people refugeed outside of Europe seek asylum in their very own country, while not being ready to accept that the real crises are happening where people are refugeed – let alone that the violence of European globalization endeavors have had their colonial share in it. Most of the *white* mainstream narratives hold that it is the fault of these people and their countries and governments alone that they are economically disadvantaged or in danger.

So, one thing is to share facts about this history and respective responsibilities. The other one is to avoid the shying away from looking at it. And this is where empathy comes in.

Just as much as racism has been a tool to kill empathy for enslaved Africans or Jews and Romano people killed at Auschwitz, empathy might be a core to undoing racism. To turn *white* people's ignorance about People of Color's being killed, be it in Gaza or Sudan, for example, into making them care is core. Most people know how to care for the people they know, be it family or neighbors, in given scaling, though. Many people also know how to care about people they do not know. Many Germans, for example, declare an ongoing solidarity with the Israelian civilians who have been taken hostage by the Hamas in October 2024. Also, when a missing persons name is all over the news, people do care about their fate and what happens to them. This is the material that is a grain of hope when fighting against racism as killer of empathy and for a return of empathy beyond racism. To make people care about other people, irrespective of whether they know them (personally), is core to

this. And this empathy does not work without or disconnected from knowing. This empathy is about knowledge's affective side. Just as much as racism invests into dehumanizing human beings, it is core to make people see all human beings in their given subjectivity and individual mode of being human. The claim that some human beings are not 'fully human' has been segregating empathy. If we look at contemporary fascism, we can see that its populism is about empathy – namely, empathy for the supporters of fascist parties. They would be the hurt ones, the dispossessed ones, and yet the ones that deserve empathy. Yet if populism wants to raise empathy for those who vote for fascists, it segregates empathy by not caring at all about those who are endangered by fascism. Eventually, any person who supports fascism does this based on knowing that fascism favors racism and its being good for *white* people, while being lethal to People of Color. Thus, why not turning these dynamics into denying any understanding for those who gaslight or support racism, into a willingness to understand racism's power to make *white* people feel good about real evil things. Not the supporters of racism are in need of understanding and empathy, but those who are attacked by them.

This focus on ending segregated empathy is not about suggesting that facts do not matter. It suggests that they need to be felt, too. To invest into the return of non-segregated empathy is about fighting necropolitics and its very base of scaling being human. Necropolitics is about caring for human lives differently and the return to care about all human lives equally is a challenge that will eventually enable empathy as a tool for intersectional solidarity.

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