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Paradox of Dignity: Everyday Racism and the Failure of Multiculturalism¹

Analyzing racism presents one of the most daunting tasks in our current intellectual environment. It involves an extreme range of kaleidoscopic and opposing stances, beliefs, convictions and conclusions. As a reality, racism is ubiquitous – it has existed at

personal, social, institutional and global levels in just about every culture throughout history and one does not need to go far from home to see an example. For many, if not for most people of color, it is a part of daily life; hence, the term «everyday racism».² On the other hand, while racism may shape the entire mode of participation in society for some, for others it may be entirely invisible – some may not even believe that there is such a thing as racism today. As a topic for analysis or discussion, it presents a tiring challenge: the academic norm is to ignore it, as it is often viewed as an *academically* insignificant problem and treated it as «merely» a problem in popular

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Exoticism and the Phenomenology of Racial Desire, in: Kim, D. (ed.) (2011) *Passions of the Color Line*, State University of New York Press;

Women and Water: At the Crossroads of Critical Theory and Technology, in: Paris, J.; Wilkerson, W. (eds.) (2001) *New Critical Theory: Essays on Liberation*, Rowman and Littlefield;

The Ontological Co-Emergence of «Self and Other» in Japanese Philosophy (2001), in: *The Journal of Consciousness Studies* 8: 5-7, 197-208.

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(2) The term «everyday racism», although it is a general expression, perhaps first claimed visibility through the work of Philomena Essed (1991). See also Sow (2009) for an account in Germany.

politics.³ Those who take up the issue know the extremely complex and interdisciplinary nature of the field – it is a theoretical mixbag and a practical nightmare. In public debates, the topic causes extreme reactions, accusations, avoidance, misrepresentations, denial and empty declarations, and the disagreeing parties hardly ever meet eye to eye; for some racism is an in-excusable failure of society, while for others it is simply an unsolvable fact of life to be accepted, if not in some obscure sense even justified.

So far, no political-institutional arrangements have succeeded in successfully containing the problem of racism. For most of the nations and cultures in the non-Western world, racism is simply taken for granted and causes insurmountable misery among the countless victims. And even in the so-called model liberal-multicultural melting pot nation, the U.S.A., despite its civil-rights movements and aggressive anti-racism education that aims at remedying its dark past, racism continues to be one of the worst social ills. (Today in «Obamerica» the «new racism», also called «color-blind» racism, is rampant.⁴) In the socially enlightened Europe that aspires to embrace a pluralistic version of multiculturalism, racism is blatantly seen. In countries such as Canada and Switzerland where multicultural or multi-linguistic systems are relatively well established, racism continues to be a serious problem. It may even be tempting to claim that it will always stay, because it has something to do with basic

(3) In the harrowing words of Lucius T Outlaw: «Persons in institutions and organizations ostensibly devoted to the production, legitimation, sanctification, and mediation of what would serve social ordering as forms of authoritative «knowledge»-teachers and administrators, natural philosophers and scientists, ministers and theologians, in schools, institutions of worship and higher learning, and in learned organizations – in fulfilling their roles would devote considerable effort to the elaboration of epistemologies by which to produce and legitimate *ignorance*. That is, lack of knowledge and understanding would be a consequence of the certainties produced by the sanctioned and legitimated knowledge that would render it unnecessary to engage with fully and humanely, with empathy and openness, thus to learn from those races deemed inferior to the Superior White Race» (2007, 198). The field of philosophy is particularly infamous for the exclusion of the so-called «non-canonical» positions and routinely omits references to racism, even for the specializations such as theories of justice, political philosophy, ethics, and moral theory. For more discussion see Outlaw (1996); Mills (2001, 2007); Sullivan and Tuana (2007).

(4) For example, Bonilla-Silva argues that the victory of Obama actually white-washes race issues and it could even weaken the progressive agenda, as his visible »blackness« obscures his centralist position. Those from the right simply declare racism is »finally over«, now that the country even has a black president – evading all responsibilities for existing racism (2010). For a systematic sociological account on the «myths of color-blindness» see Brown, et al (2003).

human perceptions or power conditions. But the issue is not «what human beings are like». *Given* that such perceptions and tendencies are our reality, and *given* that moral progress has also been made, the issue is to take seriously our responsibility for justice in our future-making capacities.

This paper presents a small subset of issues and references that are currently within the field of «philosophy of race», a relatively new field still largely unknown outside the U.S. I discuss first some general frameworks and problems that the conceptualization of race and racism raise, and analyze two common theoretical approaches for solving the problem of racism, both of which are based on the ideals of liberalism: First, the individualized conceptions of dignity, and second, the socio-political conception of democratic multiculturalism. I argue that the ontological and epistemological assumptions involved in both of these approaches actually obscure or even hinder some important paths to conceptualizing and fighting against racism.

The first, individualistic approach, leads to two types of paradoxes: I shall call them the «paradox of dignity», and the «paradox of blaming the victim». The second, multicultural approach, evades the problem of racial domination and subordination, leading ultimately to an ineffective cultural discourse, despite its good intentions.

I then address issues specific to Germany – reflecting on the (correct) dismissal and erasure of the term «Rasse» in the German language, and its possible effect on the ability to raise *race* issues today for the purpose of analyzing racism.⁵ In addition, in Germany (as well as other parts of Europe) the problem of racism today is closely linked to «Islamophobia» (the fear of Islam taking over) or other forms of xenophobia.⁶ The form of racism is not simply color-coded but heavily

(5) It is interesting to note that the very term, »philosophy of race«, would be impossible to be translated in German, due to the extremely negative and racist connotation of the term «Rasse». But the phenomenon of racism is a reality in Germany, so a question arises as to how best to formulate the language of analyses. McCarthy (2009b) points out, referring to the situation in the U.S., that even though the alleged biological notion of race is made obsolete, the same type of race-thinking continues in a culturalist mode, and the old patterns of classical racism not only did not disappear but on the contrary stayed on structurally in much the same way (565). I worry that a similar observation could be made in Germany; the erasure of the term «Rasse» and its related abhorrence for racism (historically conceived) has not made much of an impact on the cultural racism against the German-Turkish population, for example.

(6) See Terkessidis (2004) for analyses on the concepts and their interrelations among Ausländerfeindlichkeit (fear of foreigners), Fremdenfeindlichkeit (xenophobia) and Rassismus (racism) in Germany. I must add a disclaimer that I have not had a chance to incorporate here many recent sources on Rassismusforschung in the German language, such as Melter;

cultural – in fact, it is more appropriate to call the phenomenon »cultural racism« or »ethnic ostracization«. ⁷ In this sense, perhaps a new language may be necessary to address this specific problem. In conclusion I introduce an existential-political approach from Cornel West. Following his position I conclude that racism, in the end, should not be seen primarily as a problem with race per se, but it should be seen as a specific failure in democracy, to be conceptualized and dealt with as a challenge for our common political project. In order for this project to move forward, however, «seeing racism» and its politico-historical reality will be indispensable.

⇒ 1 Race and Racism

⇒ 1.1 Notions of Race

The first appearance of the term and concept of »race« dates back to the works of François Bernier in his *Nouvelle division de la terre par les différentes espèces ou races d'hommes qui l'habitent* written in 1684. ⁸ However, it was Immanuel Kant (in his *Über die verschiedenen Rassen der Menschen*, 1775) and Johann Friedrich Blumenbach (in his *De generis humani varietate nativa liber*, 1795) who further developed the concept of race as an anthropological category. In these early discussions, the notion of race was quite neutrally used to designate different human groups in different geographical regions that were perceived as biologically distinct. The concept of race

Mecheril (2009); Hund (2006, 2007); Gomes; Schicho; Sonderegger (2007); and Koller (2009). The history of racism in the U.S. is traditionally addressed in terms of the black-white binary, but recently this black-white framework has been destabilized due to what is called the »browning« of America through the influx and rapid increase in the Hispanic population and immigration from Asia. See Sundstrom (2008) for a good analysis on the ramifications of »browning of America« in race politics; Kim (2007) for a historical background on the Asian-American relation and its current impact. To the extent that Germany lacks the history of slavery and its race issues today are largely about the new immigrant population, the particular forms of racism may be more similar to the cases against Hispanics («they come and drain our system») and Asians («the eternal foreigner»), both of which contain heavily cultural elements.

(7) See Modood (2001) for a discussion of cultural racism. His focus is on Great Britain but the analysis may also apply to the situation in Germany.

(8) For the excerpts from these original essays translated into English and for the historical concepts of race in the 17th Century onward, see Bernasconi and Lott (2000); Blum (2002, 109-130). For a development of the concept of race in Germany during the 18th and 19th Centuries, see Eigen and Larrimore (2006).

resembled other notions such as peoples, nations, communities, heredity, and cultural groups.

However, since the 18th and 19th Centuries as European colonialism expanded into Africa, Asia and the Americas, the concept of race acquired a hierarchical meaning: the «white, European» race was deemed superior to the other, «nonwhite races» of Africa, Asia and the Americas, and in most cases the very humanity of the so-called darker races was robbed of its equal status.⁹ According to Lawrence Blum, during the early establishment of slavery in the English colonies, for example, the Africans were considered property but not yet fully deprived of their humanity; however, they are subsequently deemed not to be fully human precisely because the slave owners needed a rationalization to justify their Christian belief in the equality of all human beings (2002, 114-117). The slave owners did see a contradiction in treating Africans as slaves if they were understood as full human beings, so the Africans («heathens», «barbarians») were labeled «sub-human, by nature» fit to be slaves (Blum, 115). And as is well known, it was Germany's National Socialism that turned race thinking into »science« and caused one of the most catastrophic events in the 20th Century. Although the Nazi racial ideology was not demarcated in terms of «whites and nonwhites» but rather along the lines of different ethnic groups within Europe,¹⁰ the understanding of racial inferiority or racial threat that prompts exclusion, together with the European domination in the era of colonialism, established the «color-line», that is, the belief in the inherent superiority of the whites over the non-whites. This line of thought underlies the current

(9) As Alcoff puts it, «Race-making had a strong historical as well as conceptual relationship with mapmaking, in which the expanding geographical areas that came to be known by Europeans were given order and intelligibility in part through their association with racial types» (2001, 267). As such, «race-making» was a part and parcel of the European attempt to control, contain and have dominance over the «untamed Other» in Edward Said's sense – see also his seminal work, *Orientalism* (1978). For a full critique, history and development of the connections between colonialism, imperialism, «race making» and racial containment, see Mills (1997); McCarthy (2009a); Sheth (2009).

(10) For example, the well-known NS Eugenicist Hans F. K. Günther (1891-1968) elaborates in his *Rassenkunde des Deutschen Volkes* (1923) and in *Der Nordische Gedanke unter den Deutschen* (1925) a detailed list and discussions, complete with illustrations of the phenotypes of different «races» and their characteristics. However the racial groups he identifies are European groups of Nordic, Western (Mediterranean), Eastern (Slavic, Alpine) and Dinarisch (Adriatic), rather than our contemporary color-palette of black, brown, yellow and red. (In Günther's classification Jewish race was not considered European.) His publications have established him as one of the founders of the race ideology of the National Socialism. I wish to thank Mr. Hans-Joachim Pannzek for sharing his library for this material.

understanding of racism that is normative in our consciousness today. When we think racism, one of the salient features is the inferiorization of and discrimination against the non-white peoples by the dominant, white group, although inter-group racism among different ethnic groups also exists.

However, today the terms «race» in English and «Rasse» in German have acquired very different connotations as well as usage. The German term «Rasse» retains its strong biological sense and given the historical atrocity of Nazism the term is deemed sinister and outdated, and except for specialized usages in zoology or biology, it has all but disappeared from the language, although the term «Rassismus» (racism) is still current.

«Race», on the other hand, has gone through a complicated shift in its connotation in the U.S. and it is very much a current term. In the era of blatant and official racism until the 1960s, «race thinking» justified racial oppression and segregation; as such, «race» was an evil and illegitimate category, to be overcome in the «color-blind» future. However, during the Civil Rights Movement and afterwards, «race» acquired a positive meaning as it empowered people of color with «race consciousness» needed for a fight against racism in solidarity. Race became an indispensable concept in identity-formation, and «racial pride», «racial justice», «racial empowerment» all became important tools for coalition building in the communities of color.¹¹ Race is also currently used in the National Census, as it provides important demographic information. The 2010 U.S. Census contained over 15 «races» or ethnicities one could check for self-identification.¹² The information is important, for example, for determining where bilingual election regulations should be enforced, for a better understanding of where and under what condition underrepresented groups live, for gathering data about which groups are in need of further government assistance, aid programs, and so on. As the category of «race» gained a positive meaning,

(11) See, for instance, Shelby (2009) for the significance of racial identity in the black nationalist movement.

(12) For the first time in the 2010 Census the category of «Hispanic, Latino, or Spanish origin» was classified not as a race but as an ethnicity, and it is further broken down into «Mexican, Mexican-American, Chicano, Puerto Rican, Cuban, and other groups of Hispanic origin». The race categories include «white, black, American Indian, Asian Indian, Chinese, Filipino, Japanese, Korean, Vietnamese, Native Hawaiian, Guamanian, Chamorro, Samoan, Other Asian (such as Hmong, Thai, Cambodian) and Other Pacific Islander (Fijian, Tongan)». The actual Census forms are available on the Internet.

simultaneously «color-blindness» gained a negative one. It came to be associated with «ignoring specificities of race identities and inequalities» with the effect of being «blind» to the race-based discriminations. It also refers to an effort (today in connection to the largely white, right-leaning segment of the population) to override or wash out race-based anti-discrimination measures (in the name of universal equality, for instance), or to a naïve state of simply not being able to see and understand racism in its historical and current conditions. In this way, today «race» is predominantly a socio-political term denoting a «racialized group» seen in terms of the «color-line», an invisible-visible line that politically demarcates (and hierarchically orders) different groups of people largely based on their skin color and other physical/visible features, such as facial types and clothing. As Robert Bernasconi eloquently puts it, «what is most visible, is within the public realm rendered invisible to the extent that the dominant group succeeds in overlooking a minority, denying its members their place in the sun» (2001, 286) To the extent that physical features are still considered markers of racial identities and operative for racial prejudice, the term «race» has biological connotations, although the biological or genetic meaning of race is largely discredited today.¹³ The dominant usage of the term has to do with politics. Race is about «seeing racism», identity-formation, empowerment, coalition-building, the fight against injustice, solidarity, resistance, historical justice, ethics. As such, the term «race» has positive connotations as well as political currency. «Race discourse» is a public as well as an academic and systematic discourse that tries to analyze and uncover where and how racism is at work in our society, through a race-sensitive framework that captures race-specific problems. (It does *not* mean *racist* discourse.) In this essay I will use the term «race» in the political sense – that is, as a shorthand for «racialized groups» that are targets of racism, or referring to a political stance against racism.

(13) For a philosophical analysis of the untenability of the biological and genetic definition of race, see Zack (2002). However, some continue to argue for the importance of not eliminating the biological meaning of race, for a more nuanced analysis of racism. For instance medical historian Stephanie Malia Fullerton (2007) argues that race is a fully functional concept in population genetics as well, playing an important role in medicine (251), and a superficial dismissal of race as «biological» can obscure a deeper connection between what is biological and socio-political, in particular in the context of locating the site of knowledge production regarding race and racism (253).

⇒ 1.2 Particularities of Racism

Defining racism is notoriously a messy task, but here are some definitions that are fairly representative of the current use of the term.¹⁴ Blum traces the use of the term «racism» back to the 1930s among the German social scientists, who condemned the racial policies of the National Socialists (2002, 4). The term expresses moral revulsion and is characterized through the paradigms of inferiorization and antipathy toward a racialized group (2002, 8). Inferiorization is connected to «historical racist doctrine and racist social systems» such as slavery, segregation, apartheid and Nazism, all of which denigrated a certain racialized group assumed to be inferior due to their biological nature (2002, 8). Antipathy involves «racial bigotry, hostility and hatred» (2002, 8). Blum explains that simply using race notions to refer to people does not in itself consist *racism* and that this term should be used sparingly, as it is highly charged and accusatory (2002, 5-8).¹⁵ According to Albert Memmi: «Rassismus ist die verallgemeinerte und verabsolutierte Wertung tatsächlicher oder fiktiver biologischer Eigenschaften zum Nutzen des Anklägers und zum Schaden des Opfers, um damit eine Aggression zu rechtfertigen» (1987, 151). Mark Terkessidis objects to calling racism an «ideology» or «discourse» but rather he defines it as an «apparatus» involving «Rassifizierung» (racialization), «Ausgrenzungspraxis» (exclusionary practice), and «Die differenzierende Macht» (power inequity) (2004, 98). Blum further introduces the three categories that are commonly operative in today's race discourse: the distinctions between personal racism (racist acts, beliefs, attitudes and behavior), socio-cultural racism (racism in religion, entertainment, arts, advertisements and media) and institutional racism (schools, corporations, hospitals, criminal justice system) (2002, 9). Inferiorization and antipathy can occur at all of these levels, and they influence one another. Helpful as they may be to conceptualize the differences, however, these distinctions may also obscure some important and inherent connections between the levels. For example, Philomena Essed argues that the distinction between what is «institutional» and »personal« may be untenable, as it «places the

(14) For a good survey of the history of the concept of racism from the 14th Century to the present, including the role of Christianity, see Frederickson (2002). See also West (2000) for a genealogy.

individual outside the institutional, thereby severing rules, regulations, and procedures, from the people who make and enact them» (1991, 38). She may be right to take a more structural and systematic approach which tries to see the interconnections between the «macro (structural-cultural)» level and the «micro inequities» of racism, but rules and regulations that are institutionalized can surely be analyzed apart from personal prejudices, and those with racial prejudices could still believe in and support a political system (institutions, regulations, law) that is just. Let me also briefly mention here some commonly noted points about racism.

⇒ 1.2.1 De-humanization

Racial others, historically and in our present imagination, are treated as «less human» or perhaps possessing «other kinds of humanity» in its various negative meanings, such as that they lack basic morality «like ours» or they are «human but more primitive», if not «human but less developed – i.e., more irrational, more uncontrollable and thus dangerous like a beast«. Such judgments go much deeper than a mere difference in culture; it is about the allegedly inferior humanity of the racial other. As Charles Mills puts it, the «defining feature of racism, at least in its classical form, is not just the failure to recognize the equal worth of the culture of the racialized group but, more ominously, the failure to recognize their very humanity» (2007, 94). Historically, in the 18-th Century during the slave trade, people of color were treated as «property» like domesticated animals, and were accorded an ontological status somewhere between animals and humans. During the Nazi-era of German and Japanese imperialism, the Jews and the Chinese were de-humanized and demonized to the extent of mobilizing nationally sanctioned annihilation. Up until the 1960s in the United States, racism was regarded as «natural» and legitimized the unequal worth of humanness for the blacks, Native Americans and Asians. This feature of somehow seeing the degraded form of humanity in the other is perhaps acutest in racism. Sexism also de-humanizes and inferiorizes women, but women are not thereby excluded from the community (after all we need them) and the degree of hatred and especially *fear* is not comparable with sexism. Discrimination against the disabled or homeless is also based on

(15) Racism, Blum claims, should be distinguished from «racial ignorance and insensitivity» or «racial discomfort or anxiety», all of which involve perceptions of racial others but they are not based on antipathy nor inferiorization (2002, 53-77).

stigmatization and forced invisibility like racism, but if anything these individuals are more a target of pity than «de-humanized and hated». One could perhaps claim that the severely disabled (especially if it involves severe cognitive impairment) or those in permanent vegetative state are also de-humanized, but such a comparison is hardly a comfort.

⇒ 1.2.2 Ontological and epistemological reification of a group

One might say, «racism is after all a form of discrimination and we already have anti-discrimination measures». Anti-discrimination measures deal with individuals and a person can always appeal to racial discrimination, but racism involves antipathy and inferiorization of a racialized *group*, that is, the features of racist ideas are attributed to the entire group membership and objectified as such («Africans are less intellectually developed»). The relevant «characteristics to hate or dismiss» are not individualistic but seen and «known» as the negative features of the group. Such designations have a socio-political force far greater than simply a question of discrimination. They shape cultural understanding and determine material conditions for those groups through institutional racism. One could imagine that even if all race-related discrimination cases were settled through individually-based considerations, people would continue to hold racist beliefs and sentiments, attributing racial stereotypes to various groups and propagating further cases. An individualistic solution is certainly necessary but it doesn't solve the problem of racism. At the socio-political level, racialized groups suffer manipulation, economic and material disadvantage, prejudice and subordination similar to a «class»; in this sense racialized groups are *reified and controlled as a group* in a power-differentiated society. In this sense, racial reification is not simply «racial objectification», although that too occurs simultaneously.¹⁶ Racial reification involves a *systematic subordination* of the racialized group within the political economy; the racializing markers function as grounds for overall systematic economic

(16) In his interpretation of Lukács Honneth presents a somewhat psychologized reading, making the notion of reification as a form of personal objectification, based on individual attitudes and practices (see Honneth, 2008). Andrew Feenberg offers a critique and defends the structural notion of reification as present in Lukács, as a social process of agency in the political dialectic (2011). Race can also be seen in this critical structural sense, as it can mobilize a whole social process leading to emancipation.

disadvantage and participatory disempowerment. Being racially marked means less work status, worse housing conditions, lesser education and other cultural disadvantages, through institutional racism that reproduces and *perpetuates* the «glass ceiling» in job opportunities, «racial profiling», informal exclusion from certain housing markets, inferior schools, ghettoization, and the like.

⇒ 1.2.3 Emotional dimensions of contempt, fear and disgust

Racism touches personal beliefs at their deepest level (perhaps akin to religious beliefs), making it one of the most privately deep and hidden prejudices. In addition, as David Kim remarks, «racism is concerned with far more than just theory; it is a fundamentally emotional phenomenon» (1999, 116).¹⁷ There is something visceral and bodily about race perceptions (somewhat similar to homophobia) that causes people to have near-physical reactions (such as disgust and revulsion). One can intellectually claim «equality and respect of all individuals», but be quite unable to bathe or sleep together with someone of another race. Or similarly, one may again believe in the sameness of humanity but still irrationally fear someone of another race, simply because of the looks of him/her. Racism, in this sense, is embodied; it is about racialized bodies and emotional/physical relations both experienced by the self and with others.¹⁸ Again, such perceptions have little to do with the individual per se but rather it is mediated through one's perceptual beliefs about the racial characteristics attributed to a group. Perhaps a good level of «toleration» can be achieved through self-reflection and re-education about such reactions or perceptions (ideally one would not like to be simply «tolerated»), but the near-immediate emotional reactions are hard to alter. Racism, in this way, has emotional dimensions that escape arguments, intellectual comprehension and reasoning.

(17) Kim offers an interesting analysis of a «Contempt Matrix» as constituting personal racism. He analyzes the contemptuous feeling against the influx of Latino and Asian immigrants, at the thought of how they would change the national demographics, a change perceived not only in terms of economic complexities, but also in terms of the feelings of «degradation or pollution of the country» (1999, 117). This observation also seems to capture the popular perception against the immigrants in Germany.

(18) Pioneering works in this regard are Fanon's and Memmi's reflections. See Fanon (1967); Memmi (1987); also Alcoff (2001, 2006); Lee (2003, 2005); Yancy (2008); Gooding-Williams (2001, 241-245).

⇒ 2 Ideals of Liberalism

Liberalism is an explicit political framework as well as an intellectual and cultural tradition in the West since the period around the Enlightenment until today; it is nearly taken for granted as the principal meaning of modernity, together with science, technology and capitalist economy. To borrow Tu Weiming's characterization, the cherished values include «liberty, equality, human rights, the dignity of the individual, respect for privacy, government for, by, and of the people, and due process of law» (2002, 251). Its principles are universal and egalitarian—today in the West we take it for granted that all human beings, regardless of the status of birth, deserve these fundamental rights, liberties and protections. In contrast to the pre-modern or non-Western systems that may characterize human beings as inherently non-equal, today liberalism's individualistic and democratic principles inform our modern consciousness and are considered to provide the best weapons against all forms of discrimination, including racism.¹⁹

To counteract racism, one could primarily take an individualistic path, appealing to such notions as the equality, respect for and dignity of the individual, or take a socio-political path, appealing to the ideals of democracy in which the claims and freedom of all the participants are equally guaranteed. When it comes to dealing with diverse cultural groups in a society, «multiculturalism» is in order. In both cases one could argue that the evils of racism have to do with the violations of these liberal principles, and the remedies would involve restoring the principles for those who are denigrated or for the society.

In the following I shall first analyze the individual approach, focusing specifically on the notion of dignity as an attempt to counteract racism. I argue that while the principles themselves are necessary, they are not sufficient conditions for addressing racism. Due to the ontological and epistemological presuppositions of the «individual», together with the «formal bias» in the application of the notion of dignity, the individualist framework leads to contradictions, which I call the «paradox of dignity» and the «paradox of blaming the victim».

(19) It is more than ironic that the historical reality has grotesquely contradicted these ideal notions, as the original signatories of the liberal social contract theories (Locke, Hobbs) simply excluded nonwhites and the theories even justified the subjugation of the nonwhites (as «property», for example) by (land-owning) white men. In this sense, Mills argues in detail in his book *Racial Contract* that the social contract has always been a «racial contract» (1997).

I then discuss the socio-political approach, focusing on the notion of multiculturalism as an antidote to racism. I first analyze one of the representative theoretical articulations for multiculturalism – Charles Taylor’s «Politics of Recognition», followed by Charles Mills’ criticism. Mills’ conclusion is that multiculturalism, in fact, is a hindrance to solving racism. Multiculturalism, at least in the current form that we have it, ultimately fails to capture and remedy the dimension of domination and subordination – or a problem of «center vs. margins» – that is central to racism.

⇒ 2.1 The Paradox of Dignity

Perhaps reflecting the philosophical-moral-political heritage of Kant, the notion of dignity plays a significant role in the understanding of individuals and society in the German milieu. An individual, regardless of background, deserves to be treated with dignity and it should not be injured, either by others or by the State. The ideal of dignity in fact appears as the very first Article in the German Grundgesetz. It states: «Die Würde des Menschen ist unantastbar. Sie zu achten und zu schützen ist Verpflichtung aller staatlichen Gewalt.»²⁰ Apart from the problem of the vagueness of the term and that in different cultures and languages such a notion is most likely understood in different ways, and apart from the problem of exactly to whom the Grundgesetz is supposed to apply, the notion produces a paradox when it is applied as a possible remedy for the problem of racism. But first let me note some presuppositions involved in the notion of dignity. The ontological and epistemological assumptions of the concept of dignity include that 1. The «individual» is deliberately understood as devoid of cultural, social or especially racial characteristics (in order not to favor certain backgrounds over others, the principle is designed to be color-blind) and 2. Individuals are objects of respect and holders of dignity, but not groups. Cultural differences (and especially perceived racial differences) should be irrelevant and culture and identity come under what the individual freely chooses in practice – a

(20) Through Héctor Wittwer’s work on the under-determination of the notion of dignity in the German Grundgesetz I became aware of the significance and problems of the notion of dignity. On this problem, especially its ramifications in medical ethics see Wittwer (2009) (I focus here on the notion of dignity but a similar line of analysis could also be produced for the notion of «equality» or «autonomy» – a concept taken to be far more significant than dignity, for example, in the United States.). For further philosophical analyses on dignity in German, see Thies (2009).

realm of autonomy rather than a part of identity.²¹ In other words, cultures are seen as an accidental feature of an individual (after all one could switch cultural identities) rather than an integral component of the person, and the notion of dignity applies not to the cultural characteristics but to the *personhood* of the individual as such.

In this framework, racism would be a violation of due respect. Some individuals are treated without dignity because of their race, and they can appeal the violation as discrimination, if necessary, to the state that guarantees protection to all its citizens. A moral-epistemological (and at times legal) framework for solving racism would be the proper restoration of recognition and respect for the dignity of person, regardless of the color of the skin.

So far so good. This color-blind model works «in principle», in an ideal society in which the person already understands himself or herself in terms of individuality. The principle was enormously important for the Civil Rights Movement and remains essential in our liberal society. However, a problem arises in its applicability also in societies such as ours, rife with cultural and ethnic diversity, competing conceptions of personhood, various forms of inequalities, power difference, and power-based exclusionary practices.²² Here is how a contradiction occurs, a «paradox of dignity»: One seeks dignity, but its formal (colorless) structure recognizes no racial/cultural identity. But culture and one's racial identity are ontologically integral aspects of personhood – for instance, in Asia, Africa and in many other parts of the world and religions, culture and communities to which one belongs are considered an essential aspect of the person; it is integral to «who one is».²³ The notion of the «individual» may not even have a referent, except in a very abstract sense, or it is a recognizable aspect of a person but insignificant, as what is important about the person is not the fact that she can be understood as an individual, but how she

(21) Appiah (1994) defends such a position.

(22) This is the problem of the contradiction or a paradox of liberalism. It is a well-known problem involving the supposed applicability of the universalistic liberal principles to the radically diverse global content, much discussed among those who are critics of liberalism as being Eurocentric. In this sense, the formal condition of universalism actually works as a particularism. For a further discussion of this type of paradox see the section on Charles Taylor in this paper, as well as Alcoff (2001, 268-270); Arisaka (1997); Bernasconi (2001, 285-286); Parekh (2006).

(23) In Bhikhu Parekh's words, «One stresses the undeniable fact of shared humanity, but ... human nature is culturally mediated and reconstituted and cannot by itself provide a transcendental basis for a cross-culturally valid vision of the good life» (2006, 11).

is interrelated to the family, to kin, to the community, or even to the environment, and the notion of dignity or respect in such contexts has to do with recognizing the dignity of all of these groups and what they represent. One's ethnic or racial identities are also not colorful surfaces to the otherwise colorless individual, but an integral aspect of the very identity of the person (and one is also seen by others as such).²⁴ So a paradox arises when one is supposed to be recognized in her dignity but at the same time she knows that what makes up her identity is considered irrelevant or unimportant, if not «unwanted». In other words, dignity in the full sense *she* understands it is not granted at all. One would like to receive recognition for the dignity of the cultural/ethnic/racial self as well as her community, but the colorless universal principle states there is no such thing as «communal dignity» or «identity dignity». So an empty sense of dignity applied to abstract personhood to which one could hardly relate, or no actual dignity as she can experience it – either way, one remains alienated and unrecognized, but the dominant system insists that dignity is colorless and it is applicable universally.

It may be helpful at this point to introduce a distinction between the «substantive» vs. «formal» bias, in order to see the structural problem involving this paradox.²⁵ Substantive biases refer to the actual practices of prejudice that produce discriminatory conditions and inequality (housing, education, work, etc.) In other words, they are the biases already present in our society, including racist practices and perceptions. Formal bias, on the other hand, refers to supposedly neutral, rational, «formal» norms/systems, but when such principles and systems are applied to social «content» that is unequal, they produce or even enforce biased outcomes. But because of its apparent neutrality the «bias» in formal bias is hard to detect, if seen at all.

The moral and political norms governing persons and even groups of persons are themselves formal and neutral – the principles of dignity, equality, autonomy and the like – and such principles are supposed to be applicable to all. But in fact social groups do not exist as abstract recipients and bearers of such principles. For instance, for those with

(24) There is a large literature on the impossibility of separating race from one's identity. See especially Alcoff (2001, 2006); Outlaw (1996).

(25) «Substantive vs. formal» is a Weberian distinction for rationality but I borrow the discussion of bias from Andrew Feenberg's critique of the so-called «neutrality» of technology. See in particular Feenberg (1991, 179-183). The analysis works similarly for the structural analysis of racism.

power and mobility, the principle of autonomy appears self-evident, but for those without, it could be a real psychological as well as an economic burden and it could even work as a basis for further degradation («you are supposed to pull your own weight and if you cannot, then that is your own problem»). The notion of dignity functions similarly. Its very color-blind neutrality not only makes one blind to the actual practices of racism («What, racism? No, it doesn't exist. Everyone is guaranteed the dignity of personhood in our State»), but it also undermines the very possibility of framing the issue in race-oriented terms, as the persons are ontologically already understood as «colorless individuals» and known as such, although the actual visual impact may contradict it. The structural and systematic ways in which racism function are obscured in the formality and neutrality of the principles. This difficulty leads to the second contradiction.

⇒ 2.2 The Paradox of «Blaming the Victim»

This type of paradox runs as follows: One's belief in the formality and the neutrality of the principles is so strong, that when one encounters a blatant exception (for instance someone obviously treated without dignity), one «blames the victim» by claiming that the mistreated person must have done something wrong and therefore he or she must have deserved it. By blaming the victim, one preserves the coherence of the formal principles, but at the expense of denying the very reality to which the principles are supposed to be applied, thereby rendering the principles empty.

For example, with respect to racism and the notion of dignity, one may claim that since everyone deserves dignity, if some people seem not to be getting it, then they themselves must somehow lack the basic qualities of humanity (racial others, especially blacks and «foreigners», have been historically and are even at times today perceived to lack the «same kind of humanity») and therefore deserving their treatment. Or similarly, «foreigners» who are targets of racism deserve it, as they refuse to integrate and honor the principles of German law (presumed to represent the ideals of the polity). McCarthy also notes the black conservative tendency in America to blame the blacks' own culture for the apparent degradation of black communities («institutional racism is a thing of the past and today there are enough equal opportunities for blacks; if they cannot make use of it, then it is their own fault») – and calls such a move to blame

the victim a variation of cultural racism that evades institutional responsibilities (2009b, 560-561).

In «Die Leute bekommen, was ihnen zusteht. Der Glaube an eine gerechte Welt und die Gruppenbezogene Menschenfeindlichkeit» in the most recent volume of *Deutsche Zustände* (2010)²⁶, authors Claudia Dalbert, Andreas Zick und Daniela Krause present what they call a «Gerechtigkeitsparadoxon»: «Gerade jene Menschen, denen Gerechtigkeit in der Welt besonders wichtig ist, werten die Benachteiligten und die Schwächeren ab, um ihren Glauben an eine gerechte Welt zu verteidigen» (2010, 102). The empirical study illustrates well the paradox of blaming the victim. Since people's belief in the notion of justice is so strong, and they cannot accept the fact that their own lives may risk falling into the hands of injustice, they simply assert and *believe* that the world is and will always be just. If so, those who are apparently suffering injustice have somehow deserved it or they have brought upon it to themselves, and that must indeed be part of justice as well. In this example, too, the coherence and absoluteness of the principle of justice is preserved, at the expense of justifying injustice to some.

The cause of these paradoxes is the individuation of not only the identities of persons but also the attribution of moral principles. While it is true that liberal notions such as dignity, respect and equality are absolutely necessary to address racialized others, they are not sufficient; racism involves far more than the individuals and their relations that make up the society. It has cultural, structural and political components and they must be addressed on their own terms.

⇒ 2.3 Multiculturalism and Its Problems

Beyond the individualized framework, liberal theories offer yet another path to addressing the problem of racism – by way of multiculturalism. So far the theories of multiculturalism are supposed to offer the best

(26) *Deutsche Zustände* is a remarkable long-time study conducted at the Institut für interdisziplinäre Konflikt- und Gewaltforschung at the University of Bielefeld (Leitung: Wilhelm Heitmeyer), conducting empirical and socio-psychological research on the emergence, cause and development of *Gruppenbezogene Menschenfeindlichkeit* (including racism, anti-semitism, xenophobia, the degradation of the homeless, homosexuals, the disabled and the long-time unemployed, as well as Islamophobia and sexism). The study began in 1999 and as of 2010 there are 8 volumes, with numerous studies and articles tracking the various aspects of the problem in socio-political and socio-psychological contexts, including the effects of financial crisis, right-wing movements, the fall of the wall, etc. See Heitmeyer (1999-2010).

liberal strategies for addressing diversity and presumably also the «politics of difference» which includes the problem of racism, and most are indeed theoretically successful. «Respecting and acknowledging cultural difference and diversity» has become a working motto also in the popular political culture of our time. In the following I turn to the theory which has now become a standard – Charles Taylor’s version of liberal multiculturalism and present some criticisms of this type of approach.

⇒ 2.3.1 Charles Taylor: «The Politics of Recognition»

In the context of «identity politics» (or a «politics of difference») in which different identity groups (women, people of color, gays and lesbians, the disabled, etc.) all vie for recognition and power, Taylor offers a historically nuanced analysis of how we should understand the whole debate. He begins by stating that our identities are shaped by recognition and by misrecognition from others; «a person or a group of people can suffer real damage, real distortion, if the people or society around them mirror back to them a confining or demeaning or contemptible picture of themselves» (1994, 25). Nonrecognition can «inflict real harm» and it can be a «form of oppression, imprisoning someone in a false, distorted, and reduced mode of being» (1994, 25). The self-internalization of such negative views leads to destructive identity and incapacity. In this sense, «misrecognition shows not just a lack of respect. It can inflict a grievous wound, saddling its victims with a crippling self-hatred» (1994, 26).

According to Taylor the demand for recognition is a modern phenomenon linked to the collapse of social hierarchies (in pre-modern, aristocratic societies recognition was already given to the higher few and the rest took it for granted that they would not be recognized). In the modern era (18th Century on), the idea that each individual should have a unique identity (based on his or her autonomy) arose, and this idea in turn is a result of the (another modern) idea of the equal worth of human beings. If all human beings are equally worthy, then my identity should also be recognized as such. Given the interpersonal dynamic of recognition, our sense of dignity depends on it.

And an important part of individual identity is «culture», because «who I am» is dependent upon how I integrate, reflect upon, and modify my relations to my own «cultural heritage and that of other people with whom they come into contact» (1994, 7). In Taylor’s view this is the

«dialogical» nature of our identity. If culture is a significant constituent of my identity, then cultural identities should count as respect-worthy, as important components for individual identities.

If liberal democracy aspires to honor equality, dignity and freedom of individuals, then multiculturalism is in order, as full public recognition (for individuals) also entails cultural recognition and respect, as these aspects are intrinsic to self identity.

Several debates have arisen in this new context. Taylor distinguishes 1. The principle of equal respect requires that we treat people in a difference-blind fashion (i.e., a color-blind universalism). 2. Although the politics of difference depends on this equality principle, it demands recognition and fostering of the particularities of people – the difference-blind approach negates identity and forces people into a universalistic mold which may not be true to them. 3. In addition, the problem could be worse: this «difference-blind, neutral model» may not really be neutral, but actually a reflection of one hegemonic culture—namely a form of Western, modern democracy—and everyone else is forced to accept this form, culturally alien or not; it turns out, then, «the supposedly fair and difference-blind society is not only inhuman (because suppressing identities) but also, in a subtle and unconscious way, itself highly discriminatory» (1994, 43), a «particularism masquerading as the universal» (1994, 44).

In his response to Taylor Michael Walzer goes on to distinguish two forms of liberalism (1994, 99): Liberalism 1 is a strictly minimal, procedural form of liberalism meant to protect the freedom and equality of the individuals through the protection of individual rights. It presupposes a rigorously neutral state without cultural or religious commitments and is suspicious of any collective goals and group claims as they contradict its commitment to protecting individual rights.

Liberalism 2, which Taylor favors, is more permissive. It allows for a state to intervene in favor of protecting the survival and flourishing of some groups, so long as the basic rights of individuals are protected. This form of liberalism weighs «the importance of certain forms of uniform treatment against the importance of cultural survival, and opts sometimes in favor of the latter» (1994, 61). This form of liberalism is not grounded in the procedural models but on «judgments about what makes a good life – judgments in which the integrity of cultures has an important place» (1994, 61). Liberalism, claims Taylor, «can't and shouldn't claim complete cultural neutrality. Liberalism is also a fighting creed» (1994, 62). Taylor combines this interpretation of liberalism with the Gadamerian «fusion of horizons» to emphasize the

evolving nature of our society-making. We reach our judgments through «transforming our standards», and this, too, is a democratic vision (1994, 67).

This permissive model of liberalism has become perhaps *the* model for discussing multiculturalism today. It has all the elements of what people would like to see: respect for the individual, respect for group identity, respect for the equality as well as difference, and a dialogical understanding of cultures and identities, and in Taylor's case even sensitivity toward its own fallibility.

According to this model, if individuals come to appreciate the cultural identity of others and consider such identities essential to a democratic society, racism would presumably disappear, although Taylor does not specifically address racism.

Again, so far so good, as the theory goes. The problem is again the counterfactuals that we have; the liberal theory of multiculturalism in fact has not successfully addressed the problem of racism. This is more than a failure of the application of the theory to practice. As with the individualized model, the liberal theory of multiculturalism has limitations that make it ineffective in dealing specifically with the power issues that are central in racism.

⇒ 2.3.2 Charles Mills: «Multiculturalism as/and/or Anti-Racism?»

Let me illustrate the problem by way of introducing a clear critique of multiculturalism from a perspective of race theory, one offered by Charles Mills. Mills concedes that multiculturalism is not just a description of the multitude of cultures in societies, but it is supposed to be a normative enterprise designed to acknowledge and remedy the legacies of slavery, colonialism, and other forms of past domination by American and European civilizations (2007, 89-90). As such, anti-racism is supposed to be a part of the political agenda of multiculturalism. However, Mills is skeptical if multiculturalism, at least in its current culture- and recognition-based forms, can indeed address the problem of racism at all. He examines three possibilities: 1. Multiculturalism *as* anti-racism (multiculturalism can on its own represent anti-racist politics), 2. Multiculturalism *and* anti-racism (multiculturalism is necessary but anti-racism requires additional measures), and 3. Multiculturalism *or* anti-racism (multiculturalism is of little use in the anti-racist project; in fact it is a diversion from it). He takes the last, most critical position.

The chief problem Mills has with multiculturalism is its reliance on the notion of «culture». Because of its negative biological connotations, in

the standard multicultural discourse the term «race» is avoided and in its place «culture» and «ethnicity» are used. But this «ethnicization of race» hides a «double displacement»: the respectable connotation of culture hides the hideousness associated with race problems, and racial oppression is diagnosed as a particular variety of cultural oppression. With a touch of sarcasm he writes: «It seems odd to represent the history of racism, with all its attendant atrocities, as a matter of mere cultural misunderstanding and depreciation» (2007, 94). Culture, in his view, is a poor substitute for race; as mentioned earlier, racist views attack more directly the very humanity and personhood of the racial other. Citing K. Anthony Appiah Mills emphasizes: «It is not black culture that the racist disdains, but blacks. Culture is not the problem, and it is not the solution» (2007, 95).

If cultural difference is really the issue and racial difference is equivalent to cultural difference, then the culturally assimilated racial individuals or groups would not encounter racism. But this is obviously not the case. The issue «really has to do with non-white personhood itself, and the white refusal to recognize it» (2007, 97). Although an assimilated black person (say, a black surgeon or professor) might be able to enjoy certain levels of social acceptance, recognition and freedom, he will also always be «black», and without his usual social context he would be treated simply as a black (unable to flag a cab) just like any other blacks on the block.

Another difference between culture and race is that cultures are formed by spontaneous historical developments, but race has been created through a deliberate, discriminatory legislation and social customs. Racialized differences are from the beginning hierarchically conceived in the way cultures are not. For these reasons, racial injustice should not be reduced to the issue of cultural difference and recognition, «even where cultural difference *is* the key factor» (2007, 101).

Replacing race with ethnicity poses similar problems. Because ethnicities can also refer to white or near-white ethnic groups and the term «ethnicity» carries at times positive connotations, when the differentiations and the issues of recognition cover ethnicities only, the particularly negative experiences of racialized ethnic groups are obscured. The most problematic feature – *racial* subordination – ends up not appearing in analyses based on ethnicities. Racially subjugated groups are not simply one ethnic group among others, as if they otherwise stand on more or less equal grounds.

Thus, aligning racial difference to multiculturalism is problematic in a similar vein that a color-blind approach is problematic: «To the extent that race is conceptualized through the categories of official multiculturalism, and thereby refracted into a culturalist discourse that is really more appropriate for ethnicity, its peculiar features and history will evade capture» (2007, 103).

In short, the discourse of multiculturalism, the politics of difference, and recognition, are all too «culturalist» in Mills's view, obscuring the very problem of *racism* that it wanted to address but it turns out that it cannot. In Mills words,

If race exists – not merely (or at all) as culture, not merely as ethnicity – but as enduring social construct historically linked with systems of domination and subordination, then an emancipator politics cannot confine itself to «recognition», but must try to dismantle the structures of racial oppression themselves. Yet insofar as multicultural politics is primarily oriented toward the cultural, it will have difficulty in even seeing these structures (2007, 105).

According to Mills, a better conceptual framework for analyzing racism would be Marxist political economy, with such concepts as «exploitation» and «domination» (2007, 105-6). He sees the problem of racism as essentially requiring such power-based analysis; its real evils has to do with grand exploitations and the resulting racial ideologies, and this has little to do with the debates associated with the liberal conceptions of justice. Difference in «racial difference» is a question of power difference and not of group identity, and a preoccupation with the politics of recognition, as if it could solve race problems, actually gets in the way of seeing the problem for what it is. In my view Mills offers a correct critique; race problems are analytically distinct from culture problems, although the perceived target groups often have both, especially in Europe.

Apart from Mills, let me note another commonly cited problem of the *superficiality* of multiculturalism. As the immigrant German-Turkish lawyer Seyran Ateş observes, the «multikulti fad» has mobilized a group of German-hating Germans to embrace fully the idea of multiculturalism, but in content the «multicultural fanatics» merely indulge in a self-celebration of their apparent open-mindedness without the actual interest in knowing anything about the other cultures, even granting naïve self-credit that the cultural other must welcome them, too, as they are so open and friendly (2009, 14-17). As an activist against the outdated practice of forced-marriage, honor-killings and other forms of violence and oppression against women in

Islamic cultures, Ateş further claims that such a superficial celebration is actually pernicious, as the «acceptance of the other culture» makes one complicit with violence against women (2009, 18). In short, «Multikulti, so wie bisher gelebt wurde, ist organisierte Verantwortungslosigkeit» (2009, 9). Needless to say, this observation applies also to the superficial «fad» of multiculturalism in the U.S. or anywhere else. People would like to appear tolerant and multicultural, and this usually means eating ethnic food, listening to «world music», living in the so-called multicultural section of a city, perhaps traveling to the third world countries and being interested in the «plight of the indigenous peoples» and so on. Ateş astutely observes that the lack of depth among faddish multiculturalists could easily be seen when they have children; they move out of the multicultural neighborhood in order to secure better schools for their children (2009, 15-16).

However, as problematic as multiculturalism is, one must also remember that multiculturalism, in its original insight, contained important insights into respect, equality and cultural appreciation, and ultimately a multiculturalist society is in fact more desirable than an assimilationist society. In an ideal world, achieving multiculturalism and a functioning liberalism would not present problems – they are *theoretically* coherent. But when it comes to the dirty problem of racism, the purity of theory cannot wash away its real stains.

⇒ 3 The Situation in Germany

Europe, including Germany, has a different history of racism as well as current political scene than in the United States (for which the deciding history of racism is slavery and the subsequent anti-black racism). First and foremost, the German consciousness is deeply scarred from the horrendous history of racism during the Nazi period. Germans have fully internalized guilt and are ashamed, that if any nation is guilty of the worst case of racism, it is Germany and the whole world knows it and won't forget.²⁷ The notion of race and racism is so deeply connected to Nazism that today, that is about the only context in which one could talk about race and racism (as in the case of Neonazi ideology). In fact, as Terkessidis points out, race and racism have been and still are largely associated with the Holocaust (today «anti-Semitism» is a category of its own) and they are often not considered appropriate categories to understand the current situation

(27) This is a stark contrast to Japan, which still refuses fully to acknowledge and accept its racist massacres in China during the Pacific War.

of immigrants – for them the framework is either «Ausländerfeindlichkeit» or «Fremdenfeindlichkeit» (xenophobia) (2004, 13). In the minds of many ordinary Germans, Turks, Arabs, Asians, the Romas, Africans and other non-Germans are indeed not explicitly considered «races» but rather «foreigners», although racism at the same time has come to be vaguely understood today to involve antipathy against «those who are dark» and the same groups also come under «everyday racism» as well. In this sense these groups are indeed racialized along the color-line.

The Turks, Italians, Portuguese, Spanish, and Greeks came mostly in the 1960s as «guest-workers» (who were presumed to return to their home country after a year or two but stayed), and they were all first referred to and understood as «foreigners».²⁸ Among these groups, however, the Turks are singled out as the «problem» (racialized, branded «foreign and Muslim», ostracized, excluded) while the other «European and Christian» groups slowly assimilated. Today even though their children were born in Germany, the second and the third generation Turkish-Germans are still marginalized, treated with xenophobia and commonly experience everyday racism. After 9/11 it even came to be combined with Islamophobia.²⁹ In this particular sense «racism» in Germany is hardly separable from «ethnicism» and culture, taking a distinctive form of cultural racism. In Alia Al-Saji's words, with respect to Muslim women, for example: «what is differently visible is not race or skin color as such, but culture – defined largely through the perceived presence of gender oppression (ostensibly embodied in veiling practices)» and this feature distinguishes a form of racism that is not strictly color racism (2009, 77). But that the negative perceptions still has to do with some form of color racialization can be seen through a simple thought experiment: a completely «white» Moslem (say, a Norwegian who converted living in Germany) would not most likely be perceived as threatening or otherwise become a target of discrimination, but a darker-skinned, well-integrated Turk (who may not even be religious)

(28) According to the German National Bureau of Statistics (Statistisches Bundesamt) from 2008, among the 82 million German population 15.5 million (circa 18%) are Germans with «Migrationshintergrund» (immigration background), including the children who are born in Germany, and 6.7 Millionen (8%) are foreigners. The percentage of those with «Migrationshintergrund» among the newborn is said to be close to 50%. Germany is clearly already a multicultural nation and more major demographic shifts are to come.

(29) For a collection of essays on the post 9/11 race questions and their relations to the renewed nationalist discourse in the U.S., see Ortega and Alcoff (2009).

would still be likely to experience racist treatment. Or a black German-born woman would be likely to experience more racism than, say, a white-looking Turkish woman.

«People of color» in Germany, regardless of ethnicity, experience everyday racism just as in the United States, and the structural elements of racism (education, workforce, housing, criminal justice system, ghettoization) also parallel those in the United States, although the magnitude may not be comparable. In other words, the phenomenon of racialization and racism that would normally be analyzed in terms of race discourse in the United States exists clearly in Germany as well. However, as I mentioned earlier, the inability to use the term «Rasse» (or the tabu of noticing persons in these terms), although correct and perhaps historically necessitated, has contributed to a complete lack of race discourse (or even its possibility), but this «erasure of race», together with an ineffective discourse of multiculturalism, has and may further lead to serious consequences in the inability to cope with racism.

The most serious problem is the inadvertent alignment with the «denial of race», currently a right-wing tactic in the United States to counteract or silence race discourse and anti-racism movements. The proponents of eliminativism (race denial) claim that since «race» is a spurious category with no scientific foundation (which is true), all race-related discourse is suspect and that we would do better to do away with it altogether.³⁰ Because the category of race is false, the supporters of *anti-anti-racism* go on to deny also the problem of racism as real and opt for a thoroughly color-blind framework. According to Bonilla-Silva, the «ideology of color-blind racism» involves *abstract liberalism, naturalization, cultural racism and minimization of racism* (2010, 25-49). Some of the problems of abstract liberalism are already discussed above, but further, using neutral and idealized liberal principles, «whites can appear «reasonable» and even «moral», while opposing almost all practical approaches to deal with de facto racial inequality», if they uphold liberal principles (2010, 28). «Naturalization» involves an attempt at explaining away the process of racialization by claiming that it is «natural»; for example, «segregation is natural because people from

(30) Race eliminativism, as such, is not political but rather ontological; Zack (2002) and Appiah (1998) endorse the biological/genetic untenability of the concept of race, that race is not a legitimate natural kind. However, they do not deny the socio-political force of the category of race or race identity formations. Other eliminativists (Shelby Steele, Thomas Sowell, Clarence Thomas), who are conservative, use the illegitimacy of race to endorse a political position (to eliminate race-based compensations).

all backgrounds gravitate toward likeness» (2010, 28). Cultural racism is a frame that substitutes «race» with «cultural tendencies» just to avoid the category of race, but in terms of contents works just as racism does (this is the point Mills criticized). Minimization of racism is a tactic that tries to deny the significance of race, as «race and racism» are a thing of the past («We even have a black president today!»); it also involves ostracizing people of color for «using the race card» or using racism as an excuse for underachievement, all of which involves blaming the victim (2010, 29).

All of these elements could be observed in the German discourse on race, even though the common German view is not at all meant to be right-leaning or against anti-racism. It is rather an unfortunate consequence of the rejection of the term «Rasse»; it is such a negative term that one must reject it and simply believe in color-blindness; the view is reminiscent of the pre-identity-politics period in America when race was simply a bad word and color-blindness a good one. The problem, as noted already, is that eliminating the term has little effect on the structure of racism but in fact makes it nearly impossible to construct a proper discourse for tracking the problem caused by *racialization*.

A recent study of the «epistemology of ignorance» also illuminates the problem. The expression refers to an analysis of the systematic management and production of racial ignorance, so that one remains ignorant of racism and its problems, even though one acknowledges superficially that there is racism. In the words of Mills who made the phrase current in the literature:

On matters related to race, the Racial Contract prescribes for its signatories an inverted epistemology, an epistemology of ignorance, a particular pattern of localized and global cognitive dysfunctions (which are psychologically and socially functional), producing the ironic outcome that whites will in general be unable to understand the world they themselves have made (1997, 18).

Epistemology of ignorance refers to a carefully crafted strategy in public discourse, of selectively knowing the chosen facts and ignoring others, constructing a «reality discourse» in which certain facts simply do not enter. It is a collectively agreed production and maintenance of systemic ignorance that is perpetuated by the dominant discourse, a «silencing» of the minority voice. Today most white Americans live in this type of managed ignorance of what life is like for the people of

color or the reality of racism. They know little about it and prefer not to know.

The unspoken workings of the dominant culture include «white privilege» and «white transparency»: «whiteness» is not just a color-designation vis-à-vis other people of color, but it is more a form of property designating various advantages and privileges.³¹ The cases are notable in such institutional systems as the criminal justice system, housing, employment and education, but also at social and personal levels. Whites do not need to «prove themselves» constantly, but people of color often do; they are assumed to be less intelligent, less reliable, lazier, less organized, etc. For whites the positive assumptions, central location and power are already in place and functions as the «norm» (and therefore as «transparent»).

The parallel situation in Germany is not difficult to see. Most «mainstream» Germans have little interest in knowing anything about the lives of Turkish and/or other immigrants, although they may buy vegetables from a Turkish stand and eat Döner and enjoy «world culture events» on a regular basis. The «Ausländer» (foreigners) are perceived to be marginal and somehow permanently and «rightly» so. The mainstream Germans know something about everyday racism, and there are even occasional anti-racism demonstrations, but they can afford to put the entire problem aside, as if it is only a fringe issue afflicting «some people somewhere else». People of color do not have such a luxury. People of color are often assumed «not to speak German», less capable of organization, unreliable, «possessing other unfavorable cultural baggage» and so on and they would have to work much harder to get proper recognition and in many cases, never achieve it. They may have constant difficulties in finding an apartment, better jobs, proper health care, and the children often receive recommendations to lesser schools, as they are already perceived and branded with having a less brilliant future.

The current framework to work with this type of problem is «Integrationspolitik», but it is in grave need of improvement. This is a massive topic that merits more space than I have here, but let me quickly note what has often been said: while the term «integration» is used, the actual claims, policies, recommendations and popular opinion all suggest that what is meant is rather «assimilation». The framework is that the dominant, mainstream «German society» is assumed to exist and functions as the silent norm, to which all others

(31) For a detailed analyses on the issues of «whiteness» see Sullivan (2006) and Yancy (2004).

– immigrants, their German offspring with «Migrationshintergrund» and foreigners – should conform. But «integration» in its full sense means not only that the marginal groups learn to join and function in the mainstream culture, but more importantly, the mainstream acknowledges, recognizes and *appreciates* the contributions and cultural wealth of the diverse groups that make up society. The non-dominant groups retain their cultural identities and they receive a fully accepted place and understanding within the workings of the society, transcending the «center-margin» paradigm. They are *integrated* in the sense that the appreciation goes in both directions; «diversity» becomes the working principle for all and not «the main group vs. the others». Concretely, it might mean that the Germans should learn more about Turkish culture, people and Islam (in all their positive and negative aspects), for example, integrating the understanding of Ramadan and considering it important as *an aspect of their own culture*. The fact that a suggestion such as this appears far-fetched and «outrageous» is a testimony to the current mainstream unwillingness to admit that the Turkish culture has indeed become a part of German society today.

The model of integration still operates under the liberal multicultural framework, as if the problem has to do with integrating different cultural groups, languages and claims. But the actual problem is much darker; the cloak of culture hides the underlying but real force of cultural racism, in particular the fully accepted white supremacy of the mainstream over people of color, and this picture in color must become visible. One may still say, «but why bring in the dead concept of race? It is more about those who are non-German, so it is really more about other cultures – especially the Islamic ones as they don't integrate». Granted that in Germany the problem *is* indeed heavily cultural and the language of race *is* dead, it is nevertheless possible to highlight the racist elements in the battle over culture.³² We need to see more clearly the *power-based institutionalization of racism* that makes integration difficult, if not nearly impossible at this point. This has to do with the question of tracking political representation, increasing the percentage of people with «Migrationshintergrund», especially people of color, in workforce, leadership, teaching positions and in media, as well as providing better quality support for the education of the children from the marginalized groups, and above all,

(32) In this sense what might be needed is what Robert Gooding-Williams calls a «race conscious multiculturalism» (2006, 87-108) or Sundstrom's notion of «responsible multiracial politics» (2008, 109-131).

instilling a public discourse that sees the lack as *deficiency of political culture*, and for this, understanding institutional and cultural racism through race discourse would be the most direct path.

But realistically, can one resuscitate the notion of race at all in the German context? Certainly, there is no way to resuscitate the term «Rasse» in the language, but the critical driving force of race discourse could perhaps be introduced through some form of racism-analysis. In the absence of American-style identity politics in Germany, it is perhaps not necessary to talk about «racial empowerment», «racial justice», «racial pride» and other race-oriented identity markers, but some insights from race discourse could certainly help one become more aware of the process of racialization and its ills. The relevant factors to see, besides the color-line, are the historical legacies of racism and how they still manifest today in our consciousness and institutions (including the problems of race-related de-humanization, reification, ostracizing, and subordination) as well as the way in which improper grouping, simplification, stereotyping, exclusion and internalized inferiority are all used for the purpose of maintaining the status quo of the dominant group. For the afflicted groups, such «critical race consciousness» would help undoing the deeply entrenched inferiority complex, self-alienation and self-depreciation, and equip them for a better understanding and ground for fighting racism.

⇒ 4 Racism and Democracy

Liberalism has been one of the defining features of European modernity and indeed it has provided a foundation for equality and securing the rights of people; the American Civil Rights Movement could not have been conceived without liberalism. Its principles of respect, equality, freedom, autonomy and the democratic state are absolutely necessary in order to fight racism. However, at the same time its color-blindness and the universalistic presupposition of the nature of personhood have inadvertently contributed to the evasion and inability to deal critically and effectively with racism. Thus, it turns out ultimately that the liberal debates about rights, justice, or the theories of multiculturalism, cannot adequately grasp the real injustices of racism.

Practically speaking, as Essed has pointed out, racism is a systematic problem, so a multi-level approach would be necessary. That is, one must see the problem from the institutional, socio-cultural, as well as individual levels, and they interact and influence one another

hermeneutically. At the institutional level, one must recognize the effects and patterns of unequal educational opportunities for minorities; possibly inadequate health treatment due to the language barrier; discriminatory practices in housing and work, lack of political representation, as well as uncover the dynamics of race-based reification, domination and subordination. At the socio-cultural level, one should critique negative stereotyping, racially damaging public discourse, symbolism, art-forms, cultural representations in the media, changing the common social language (for example referring to Germany as a multicultural nation), affirming intersubjectivity and the reciprocal nature of communication and identity formation,³³ a positive introduction of diversity education at all social levels including institutions, and so on. At the personal/individual level, one must examine the nature and origin of racist perceptions and change them,³⁴ through becoming aware of being the subject and object of racial contempt, fear, disregard, or positively, affirmation, friendship, love. Again the transformations that may occur at the personal level would influence the socio-cultural level, and since institutional functions, rules and regulations are also made and changed by individuals who participate in them, it would also have an effect at the institutional level, which in turn can further change personal views. By way of a conclusion, let me introduce an alternative approach for addressing racism presented by Cornel West. A theologian, philosopher and public intellectual, Cornel West, in his influential book *Race Matters*, presents what may be called an existential-political path for solving race problems. Although the book focuses on the

(33) For a general philosophical defence of the centrality of intersubjectivity and recognition for a political theory see Honneth (1992 and 2003, 71-105). Although Honneth does not extensively discuss racism, he seems to categorize it also under the umbrella of his all-encompassing theory of recognition, framing it in social, intersubjective and psychological terms; «Rassismus ... als ein Phänomen verstehen sollen, das das Gesamtverhalten einer Persönlichkeit bestimmt als Produkt sozialisatorischer Deformation zu beachten» (Honneth/Krassimir 2007, 1). However racism involves far more at the institutional level (such as the question of economic subordination) which may not be subsumed under the theory of recognition. For a debate on whether distribution questions could be subsumed under the recognition theory or not, see Fraser and Honneth (2003). Again racism does not explicitly appear in the discussion, but for an analysis particular to racism were to be produced, I may side with Fraser.

(34) Honneth further claims that racism is a question of improper socialization that has become habitual; it cannot easily be changed through the education system, but it requires something of a «conversion» through a change in the socialization-process (Honneth/Krassimir 2007, 2). As such, changing race perceptions must reach this deeper psychological level.

American situation, many points could be seen also as applicable in Germany. The most significant message of the book is its suggestion that the current state of racism in America illuminates an existential crisis, a real nihilistic collapse of the black community, and this must be understood as a *common democratic challenge* of all citizens; «the presence and predicaments of black people are neither additions to nor defections from American life, but rather *constitutive elements of that life*» (2001, 6, West's emphasis)³⁵. A serious discussion of race in America needs to begin «not with the problems of black people but with the flaws of American society – flaws rooted in historic inequalities and longstanding cultural stereotypes» (2001, 6). We must break the deep-seated assumption that the dominant, white Americans define and shape what America is and will be, and the black folks must simply «fit in», solving their own problems.

But deeper than the structural or behavioral problems of racist America, West calls us first come to terms with the debilitating *nihilism* in black America. We need to «face up to the monumental eclipse of hope, the unprecedented collapse of meaning, the incredible disregard for human (especially black) life and property in much of black America» (2001, 19). The devastation of moral energy causing despair, depression and dread is more than a problem of economic deprivation and political powerlessness. This is a serious problem overlooked by both liberals (who focus on structural issues) and conservatives (who focus on behavioral problems). The existential and psychological realities of black people must be acknowledged and understood; «*the lived experiences of coping with a life of horrifying meaninglessness, hopelessness, and (most important) lovelessness*» (2001, 23, West's emphasis).

What does West propose as a direction for addressing the catastrophic state of race in America? We need to restore humanity, hope and a sense of future and this is not simply a project for black folk but our common democratic endeavor. West calls it a *politics of conversion* based on a *love ethic*:

Nihilism is not overcome by arguments or analyses; it is tamed by love and care. Any disease of the soul must be conquered by a turning of one's soul. This turning is done

(35) Similarly states West: «Race is the most explosive issue in American life precisely because it forces us to confront the tragic facts of poverty and paranoia, despair and distrust. In short, a candid examination of *race matters* takes us to the core of the crisis of American democracy. And the degree to which race *matters* in the plight and predicament of fellow citizens is a crucial measure of whether we can keep alive the best of this democratic experiment we call America» (2001, 155-156).

through one's own affirmation of one's worth – an affirmation fueled by the concern of others. A love ethic must be at the center of a politics of conversion (2001, 29).

What he calls «love ethic» is not about sentimental feelings of connections, but it is based on the Christian notion of the «universal love of mankind»: it is an attempt at «generating a sense of agency among a downtrodden people» (2001, 29). As seen in Toni Morrison's *Beloved*, «Self-love and love of others are both modes toward increasing self-valuation and encouraging political resistance in one's community (2001, 29)». The love ethic also reflects West's overall project of «prophetic pragmatism» imbued with his political Christianity. He gives political meanings to the traditionally Christian notions of hope, compassion, love, redemption and transcendence and sees salvation as a social process achieved through human history. He argues that through these politicized Christian notions one could most effectively reach the disenfranchised peoples and classes caught in the incapacitating forms of nihilism, leading to the politics of conversion. Self-affirmation and empathy turn into political consciousness, and this is a felt mode of connection rather than through a conceptual understanding of such ideas as justice, fairness, and equality (although the ethic will result in upholding and embodying such concepts as well). The strength is in its immediacy and connection to others, as well as its power to move people, as emotions are often contagious and have enormous affective force. If nihilism is an existential devastation, then the love ethic is a counter-attack at this existential level.

A politics of conversion begins at a local, grass-roots level (for example through «intermediate institutions» such as churches and community centers).³⁶ What should be addressed directly are the problems of nihilism – promoting self-worth, self-affirmation, the sense of communal hope, love and respect. In this way a politics of conversion addresses behavioral and moral problems at the personal level, yet in addition it aims to invigorate democratic organizations and communities. And through such small institutional establishments a larger movement can be won, eventually shifting public consciousness, leading to an even larger movement. Although the

(36) In West's words: «those intermediate institutions that affirm the humanity of black people, accent their capacities and potentialities, and foster the character and excellence requisite for productive citizenship, are beacons of hope in the midst of the cultural and moral crisis» (2001, 88).

locus of the love ethic, at least in the beginning, is the black community, the principles and the conditions of hope are universal. Beyond West, we may be able to point out a number of similar problems in the German situation. The racialized minority groups, although they are historically different from the black population in America, suffer disproportionate social and political disadvantage and the chasm is growing. In many large cities «Turkish ghettos» have already appeared, with similar problems of nihilism, loss of hope and orientation, violence, drugs, criminalization, collapse of education and health, social exclusion and stratification. The «left-right debate» that cast the issue in terms of «problem people» exists here as well, though with a different tone, due to the fact that the racialized minorities are still largely perceived as «foreigners». But whether social help and more economic measures would appropriately address the problem («we» must do something about the «immigrant population»), or if the problem is perceived to be caused by the cultures of the afflicted groups themselves (and if so, *they* must assimilate into «our» mainstream culture in order to solve *their* problem) parallels the debates in the U.S. Lack of good leadership is another problem – just as there is a grave lack of strong black leadership in America, in Germany there is a grave need for a good leadership from the minority groups that integrates the overall population. And most notably, both in the American as well as the German cases a lack of framework to see the problem as a *common problem* presents a serious challenge.

Today we can no longer afford to view racism as a marginal problem afflicting certain groups of people or even a problem of race per se. Not only in Europe and in the United States but on a global scale, the demographic shifts indicate a rapid and disproportionate increase of the nonwhite population as well as the unprecedented levels of global mobility in the economy and workforce. We may not be able to detect it now but the era of global white dominance may slowly come to an end. The economic, political, cultural and social transition will not be without difficulty and contestations, but paths for liberation and democracy will always be fought for. Understanding race and racism will be even more necessary in such a world, as the standard color-blind models and theories will face constant challenges and new visions and possibilities must be sought. «Enlightenment leading to emancipation» is an original vision in critical theory, Outlaw reminds us, and further, «social learning regarding «race», steered by critical social thought, might help us to move beyond racism, without reductionism, to pluralist socialist democracy» (2001, 82). As such,

the problem of racism is indeed a shared responsibility of democracy affecting all members of the society, and we should open our eyes and prepare ourselves to live through the already occurring global transformation. Following W.E.B. DuBois (who famously declared that the problem of the 20th Century was the problem of the color-line), West continues the legacy: «the problem of the twenty-first century remains the problem of the color line» (2001, XIV).

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