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racism and discursive belongings

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This paper is based on the assumption that migration movements irritate the orders of belonging associated with and produced by symbolic, structural, legal, and territorial borders. In the discourses accompanying such crises, these crises themselves become thematic in a certain way and can thus be understood and contextualized. In their thematization, solutions to the respective crises are also presented as desirable. In this sense, they can also be understood in terms of their contribution to a (European) subjectivation. Discourses have the quality of education insofar as they convey world and self-relations by means of which individuals can (learn to) understand themselves as subjects. In the field of migration, discourses are connected with symbolic orders of belonging, which are often closely related to racisms.

Keywords: belonging, crisis, discourse, migration, racism

Introduction: Doing white Europe again

Adorno's well-known formulation of Grabbe's quotation that only those who are desperate can save themselves has a cynical ring to it these days. For it is not only in view of the terrible scale of violence, destruction and physical annihilation unleashed in the near-by war in Ukraine that the question arises as to how great the degree of despair must be to be able to hope for salvation. Even in view of the discursive concomitants of the current war, such as the reinvention of a White Europe, it is impossible to ignore the cynicism with which the migration of refugees because of the events of the war are characterized and their regulations justified. The current contributions in the discourses of various digital and non-digital public spheres are a source of sheer horror about the way in which we/non-we constructions and affiliations are emphasized as significant in the face of people fleeing – and thus also about which ones are currently considered insignificant and which ones were considered insignificant in the past. Speechlessness arises in the face of rhetoric that blatantly resorts to racism, for example when it is said that those who are now to be welcomed and taken in are people who are "civilized" and "look like us" because they come from Europe!

No less impressive, of course, is the extent of civil society's solidarity that such "we" constructions are capable of mobilizing. But the question arises, both currently and in retrospect: under what conditions are differences in expression of solidarity made at all, or have been made in face of the war in Syria? This applies not least to the question of why the EU Mass Entry Directive (EU-Massenzustrom-Richtlinie) has now been reactivated, but why this migration policy option was not considered in 2015/16. After all, it guarantees migrants a secure residence status, even if only temporarily. But apparently not all refugees are the same, and so even hastily quoted migration researchers will readily explain differences between them. Obviously aware that birth rates have an analytical quality to explain differences, they refer to different fertility rates (Ramadan, 2022).

Critical migration research, on the other hand, could examine the respective we/not-we constructions, for both 2015/16 and now, in a comparison informed by belonging theory (Geier & Mecheril, 2021). Both the wars in Syria and Ukraine are comparable as bellicose crises, but the discourses accompanying them have produced quite different effects in terms of the refugee migrations they trigger. It would be necessary to analyze how the respective crises become thematic in the media and politically, among other things, and which solutions are claimed to be significant in the process. A first attempt at such a comparison based on the theory of belonging tends to make it clear that in 2015/16, refugee migration was passed off as a threat to Europe, while now Europe itself is perceived as threatened by war and the reception of refugees is seen as a contribution to imaginary strengthening in the sense of its solidarity. However, a comparative study would also bring continuities to light. This is illustrated not least by the merciless practice of pushbacks at the Polish-Ukrainian border as a means of choice, which has already become an illegal routine at other European external borders. All in all, it becomes clear not only that double standards are applied to solidarity, but also how racism is resorted to in the process and institutionalized in this way.

In the discourses accompanying the respective crises, these crises themselves become thematic in a certain way and can thus be understood and contextualized. With their thematization, solutions to the respective crises are also presented as desirable. In this sense, they can be understood in terms of their contribution to a (European) subjectivation. Discourses have the quality of education insofar as they convey world and self-relations by means of which individuals can (learn to) understand themselves as subjects. In the field of migration, discourses are connected to symbolic orders of belonging, which are often closely related to racisms. In this respect, it can be said that "racism educates" (Broden & Mecheril, 2010). Lastly, such discourses contain aesthetic dimensions, because they endow concepts of corporeality and affectivity with legitimacy and illegitimacy.

Migration: Border, movement and disquiet*1*

Migration problematizes and irritates the orders associated with and produced by symbolic, structural, legal, and territorial borders. Borders are to be understood as contingent structural formations. They can be questioned, dissolved, redrawn and transformed by migration movements (Geier & Zaborowski, 2016, p. 5). Migration as the transgression of borders, however, is at the same time accompanied by the confirmation of what exists. For example, at the moment of their transgression, nation-state borders become visible in a special way and their power of validity is reaffirmed. Or borders are re-established, as exemplified by the history of the Schengen area (Kasparek, 2019, p. 17) or, most recently, reactions to the threat of Sars-Cov2. Or – as is currently the case – older borders of military affiliation are again emphasized in terms of their validity and genesis.

The transgression of boundaries, to put it in the most succinct terms, both weakens and strengthens their validity. In this sense, the central social theoretical characteristic of that cross-border mobility known as migration is that it is associated with the unsettling of social relations and regulations. Perhaps it is even reasonable to assume that it is the phenomenon of unsettling that turns global social mobility into migration. Migration traps, irritates, and affects established social orders in a sensitive way.

The social field of education also shows a disquiet caused by the thematization of migration. This disquiet affects and generates pedagogical order formation under conditions of migration in equal measure. First, migration phenomena confront the national-social institutionalized pedagogical

organizations with the constructions of normality embedded in their practices, which function as boundary-drawing processes. This affects all levels of pedagogical action, their organizational forms, methods, contents as well as pedagogical self-understandings and their professionalism as a whole. Migration movements question not only the functionality but also the legitimacy of social institutions and organizations. The limitations of their constructions of normality and identity become precarious or visible in their precarious status in view of their exclusion from forms of life and biographical patterns as well as social inequality that cannot be legitimized democratically. This shows how racisms are or can be supported and mediated by pedagogical institutions.

Empirically, research on difference in educational science, for example, shows that differences are created in pedagogical practices, in micro-logical interactions, but also at the meso level of organizations (their specifications, frameworks, routines, discourses, processes), that is, differences are generated in a specific, inherently logical way and are thus socially produced. This mostly reconstructive research answers the question of how difference is understood at all in the distinctive knowledge of pedagogical actors, from which discourses knowledge about differences is fed, and how it is referred to in pedagogical practice – in distinctive practices (Geier, 2018).

Critical migration research could tie in with educational discrimination research here, first, to clarify how and through what, in the face of society's anxiety about migration, boundaries are taken up, understood, and indeed processed in pedagogical organizations. Second, such research could reconstruct how in and through pedagogical institutions, their practices and discourses, differences are endowed with meaning and subsequently become boundaries of inclusion or exclusion. The historical contingency with which groups or individuals are socially constructed in the context of norm and deviation would have to be considered. This construction takes place, for example, through stereotyping, homogenization, naturalization for the purpose of their symbolic devaluation and thereby possible valorization of the attributors. An empiricism critical of racism could make a significant contribution to this.

Religious affiliation(s) as a threat

The historical contingency of semantic attributions of difference is particularly evident in the discourse of religious affiliations. Since 2015 and 2016, if not before, discursive staging of threat have been increasingly encountered in Europe and in Germany, not least in the public spheres of the digital world. These warnings sometimes refer to uncontrolled migration as a threat to the social order (Wendekamm, 2014). Overstrain by mass and endangerment by violence (willingness) are perhaps the overriding discursive topoi here. A multitude of public statements on the significance of (refugee) migration that has come to the public's attention could be used to show how disquiet becomes threat (Detering, 2019).

These all are rhetorics in which orders of religious belonging are invoked and made significant. In them, Christianity and Islam are first identified, distinguished, and differentiated from each other with the claim of unambiguity, as if it were clear what is being talked about when "Christianity" or "Islam" is mentioned. The next step of unambiguity is to link religiously coded phenomena unambiguously to territories, societies, or nations, which are called "countries." As in a cartography, religions are geo-territorially defined and territories are religiously coloured, just as if these spaces were imbued with the respective religion. This threefold unification (identification, distinction and territorialization) is, moreover, connected with a clear logical evaluation of belonging: they lack something which we possess. Now this possession is neither a raw material found in the countries,

nor fate or providence; it is rather an achievement that subjectivizes the countries. Thus, as subjects, they become distinguishable between those who have developed something and those who have failed to do so.

Following on from Stuart Hall's analyses of racism, it can be said that 'Islam', like 'race', can be understood as a "sliding signifier" (Hall, 2018, p. 55) and thus forms a functional equivalent to 'race'. The signifier 'Islam' is apparently able to fix quite different dimensions of belonging – religious, social and (state) political as well as cultural and territorial – in a "chain of equivalence" (Hall, 2018, p. 79) and to homogenize them across all differences in the chain in such a way that, without referring to a compelling or possible correspondence between them, they appear as naturalized and de-historicized properties of 'Islam'. From a hegemony theory perspective, it can be emphasized that with the signifier 'Islam' a "constitutive outside" (Stäheli, 2000, p. 25) is set, which becomes logically significant in terms of belonging, because with it the difference of 'us' and the others can be asserted as a categorical boundary. A process described as othering, among the "key concepts" of postcolonial studies (Ashcroft et al., 2000, p. 156) and mediated by colonial patterns of construction and exclusion of the Other in terms of Orientalism (Said, 2014). Due to the efficacy of these patterns, it usually only takes a terse remark about, say, a developmental lag to symbolically proclaim the order.

Addressing 'Islam' as the religion of particular societies is known to be part of a global (geo)political discourse. French sociologist Eric Fassin notes, "That the rhetoric of the 'clash of civilizations' emerges at the end of the Cold War should not be seen as accidental: It is a bit like the return of the politically repressed to post-political neoliberal democracy, as could be seen after the sexual assaults of Cologne" (Fassin, 2019, p. 39). Giving meaning to the antagonism of friend and foe, discourse admittedly shifts to the cultural, which has now become the decisive arena for the classificatory determination of 'us' and 'not us'. Classification, that is, the discursively produced and historically mediated knowledge about and around differences, is what gives visible phenomena their meaning in the first place. Conversely, the classification that gives them meaning is inferred from the visible phenomena. The sensually perceptible thus becomes the apparent proof of the validity of the classification and the classified differences thus receive their real and physical expression. Accordingly, religious symbols, a headscarf, a bearded costume, or a minaret represent the visible phenomenal side of the classifying order of belonging and manifest it at the same time.

The visibility of Muslim ways of living (Göle, 2016), the everyday and bodily co-presence of 'the others' calls for reparative practices. When rhetorically signalling that the order of belonging is threatened, this simultaneously launches the call to also preserve or (re)establish this order. According to the logic of the antagonism of friend and foe, Muslims who do not live on the terrain assigned to them by the corresponding order of belonging must be staged and perceived as out of place and as a threat to the order. The orders of affiliation are repeatedly invoked, which has recently led to a whole series of more or less organized attacks against Muslims with deadly consequences (Riese, 2020). The acts testify to the fact that those who committed them heard the call to order.

Neoliberal devaluation and classification: Racism as human differentiation

In the crisis of a valid order of belonging, it can be said, the order of belonging is itself strengthened. A central figure of its reinforcement consists in relegating the Others, in the sense of thinking that follows the ethnopluralist principle (Balibar, 2014), to the place imagined as ancestral

– whether in violent language and action ('the right-wing extremists'), or for the time being civilly and 'democratically' (in the form of deportations not least of children and young people). As long as no claims of belonging are made, liberality, cosmopolitanism and humanity can be shown to the outside world and also to others. However, as soon as the otherwise unquestionable and sacrosanct principle of being privileged in this place is called into question, the face that was previously shown to the outside world turns out to be a mask and the "dagger of racism" (Bauman, 1995, p. 95) is drawn.

In the context of what Zygmunt Bauman has analyzed as the biopolitical consequences of global modernization processes, the systematic political-economic context of meaning of migration-society discourses of threat is explained: "The production of human waste – more correctly : useless people (by which is meant the 'surplus' and 'supernumerary' part of the population that either could not stay in its place of residence or was denied the necessary recognition or permission for further residence there) – is an inevitable result of modernization and an inseparable concomitant of modernity. It is an inevitable side-effect of the construction of a social order (every social order classifies some part of its population as 'out of place,' 'unsuitable,' or 'undesirable') and of economic progress (which cannot continue to develop without downgrading and devaluing formerly effective ways of earning one's livelihood, thus inevitably depriving those who do so of their livelihood)" (2005, p. 12).

It is thus in the logic of the global "extension of neoliberal rationality to all spheres of life, from the innermost sensibilities to political action, through the generalization of a financialized model of 'human capital'" (Fassin, 2019, p. 38) that the production of uselessness, i.e., of useless human life, occurs. However, the distinction that is constantly being produced requires the taxation of human beings and presupposes their identification as useless. In biopolitical discourse, not least in the political regulation of migration, a distinction is made between good and bad, useful and useless subjects. Judith Butler, in light of the Iraq war, its aftermath as well as its conditions, writes: "Institutionalized and active racism at the level of perception produces iconic representations of populations that are highly grievable, and it produces images of groups whose disappearance is not a loss and who remain un-grievable" (Butler, 2010, p. 30).

To be sure, the (symbolic) ways of identifying and valuing them can be basically diverse. However, they are often associated with migrants due to the associated notion of the extensive legitimacy of a disposition over the Other(s) (Kourabas, 2021). When persons are not in the place they are accustomed to in the symbolic order, especially for those addressed as 'migrants', only proving to be useful or being usable will lead to the expulsion being suspended. But because the useless endanger the order, they must be disciplined, in the case of migrants demonized as 'economic refugees' – as if economic motives, the striving for one's own advantage are unusual under conditions of capitalist relations –; where this succeeds, the basis of legitimacy is created for disposing of them on the grounds that they are useless and threatening.

The call to defend one's own borders against the invading Others, and to accept their mass death in the Mediterranean, or – in the words of Alexander Gauland[2] – to take the Others away like garbage, is probably also fed by the concern evoked by threat discourses that the neoliberal universally produced uselessness can in principle affect everyone. For "the world is turning black," Achille Mbembe (2015, p. 11) explains, and thus it is consequently all the more necessary to make sure of one's own 'whiteness,' to prove one's usefulness, one's creditworthiness in the face of the neoliberal principle, for there is a danger of being deprived of this "'whiteness'" (Fassin, 2019, p. 41) and of losing all the privileges associated with it, associated in colonially mediated patterns with

righteousness and legitimacy.

Conclusion

Racism is thus always available discursively as an option, as a dormant possibility, to explain one's perception, thinking, and acting in one's own world- and self-relation as well as that of others. Racism can be invoked as a taxonomy, as a classification of classifiers, in order to establish categorical differences for the purpose of de-humanizing others. An educational and pedagogical analysis would have to consider that pedagogical institutions are also always part of racism and its discourses. Ways out of racism are probably only achievable through its analysis. Outlining its systematic and historical ubiquity in the context of migration from a perspective informed by belonging theory is the pursuit of this essay.

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1. The following considerations can also be found modified and in longer form here: Geier & Mecheril, 2021.
2. Gauland (AfD) called for the "'disposal'" of SPD politician Aydan Saliha Özoğuz "in Anatolia" and issued the admonition "not to be blackmailed by children's eyes" when it comes to defending one's own borders in the course of refugee movements – even if this requires the use of the order to shoot (Detering, 2019, p. 13).