

Migrant, Black and People of Color Resistance

DEFINITION / DESCRIPTION

Although it has been invisibilized for over decades, the political self-organization of migrants in Europe and elsewhere is as old as its presence. This is also the case within Higher Education Institutions (HEI). Migrant, Black, and People of Color (Migra*BPoC) experiencing institutional and everyday racism in HEI are raising the question of how to challenge and transform HEI: Why is my curriculum white? Why is my professor not black? How to decolonize the university? These questions have been raised in student struggles in South Africa 2015-16, in the UK, and in the Netherlands in 2017 as well as in Germany in the last years, leading Migra*BPoC to organize against racism practices which take place in the campus.

Migra*BPoC resistance addresses a multi-issue and multi-dimensional agenda by looking at interlocking systems of oppression and their effects on racialized bodies. It also works on a transdimensional basis by interlinking the personal, interpersonal, structural, and institutional dimensions of violence. How intersectional racist violence impacts on Migra*BPoCs' wellbeing, individual and collective striving in HEI stands at the center of Migra*BPoC resistance. On a personal level Migra*BPoC resistance engages with self-care, community care, and healing processes. Creating collective structures of support, Migra*BPoC resistance builds from the premise that learning to love and accept oneself in an environment that ignores one's existence, and negates the collective achievements and societal contributions of these collectives, is foundational for navigating and dismantling the barriers in HEI.

Thus, striving for emotional well-being within an environment that rejects one-self by appreciating and uncovering the genealogies of knowledge inserted in the struggle of Migra*BPoC resistance is crucial for building an anti-racist environment in HEI that provides collective emotional and practical tools to overcome isolation, competition, and depersonalization. Migra*BPoC resistance includes but is not limited to academic-political alliances with Migra*BPoC networks. It engages with new formats of collective learning, decolonizing education and the building of an inclusive intersectional and anti-racist university. Further, it works towards pro-active peer support and transnational solidarity networks.

P R O C E S S

M E T H O D O L O G I C A L A P P R O A C H

Two workshops were held with migrant students (B.A. and M.A.), migrant doctoral students and post-docs, enrolled at Higher Education institutions in Giessen, in 2020. Both workshops were composed of international exchange students, migrants (either with first or second-generation migration biographies), and some with forced migration and refugee experience (either directly or indirectly). About half of them are regular attendees at an.ge.kommen. An.ge.kommen e.V. is a nonprofit organization that mainly works together with refugees and migrants to create and foster transcultural spaces in Giessen, Germany.

Further, the members participating in these two workshops represented different trajectories to education and experiences with inclusion and exclusion, based on gendered, racialized, and economic inequalities, religious beliefs and geographical belongings. Though diverse in their individual experiences, the participants of the workshop reflect different pathways of migration, exile and diaspora in Germany.

The first workshop was held at an.ge.kommen e.V. premises, on January 30th, under the title “How do you feel about your academic experience in Germany?”. Here, the group was invited to make a collage with the question “How do I feel about my university/my academic experience in Germany?”. After having identified a rather pessimistic and individualizing bias after the first workshop, the second workshop, held at the premises of Graduate Centre for the Study of Culture of Justus-Liebig University, on February 27th, aimed at fostering empowering dynamics that deindividualize discrimination experiences and rather identify possibilities for institutional change. This workshop had the title “What gives you energy?”.

Both workshops aimed at creating awareness (concientizar) about the interplay of everyday individual experiences of different dimensions of discrimination on the one hand, and self-supporting, strengthening and positive dynamics and practices at university. For this, in a first step, an individual reflection of everyday situations and the feelings attached to it took place to open the space for individual reflection. Methods used here were a combination of visual, creative individual work. This was followed by a collective reflection on these individual experiences, accompanied by meaning-making of these situations and connecting them with each other to understand the underlying causes and structural processes that lead to discrimination (problem-posing). The last part focused on changes that need to happen on the structural level in order to stop racism at

university. The second and third parts of the workshops already had an analytical and inductive dimension.

After each of the workshops, a smaller group (migrant students, doctoral and post-doc students) met in order to reflect on the main observations, analysis, and assumptions made in the workshop. A mind map connecting the different examples was elaborated and a further theoretical elaboration took place. This collective exercise pointed to the fact that the most pressing topics during the workshops were Eurocentric practices and dynamics leading to compliance, as well as recognizing and articulating intersectional vulnerability and the need for political self-organizing around questions of Migra*BPoC students and staff experiences in HEI.

FINDING THE CONCEPT

The relevance of including Migra*BPoC resistance in HEI within our toolkit parted from our own biographies and life stories as we identify ourselves as migrant academics, international scholars with migration biographies, and activists in Migra*BPoC networks.

These identifications intersect with each other and are a result of our life stories and experiences. While each life story is different, we face similar experiences that cannot be explained but through the way racism, Eurocentrism and neoliberalism have affected us. We have gone through specific experiences that made us seek new ways beyond neoliberal compliance to face Eurocentrism and have brought us in touch with different Migra*BPoC networks and activists along this path. The elaboration of the concept and its definition is thus a result of our acknowledgment for the diverse and heterogeneous forms that Migra*BPoC resistance has taken in HEI in Germany and of our own trajectories.

We hope to contribute through this interweaving of biographical and self-reflections to an understanding that connects collective resistance initiatives (such as networks, alliances, organizations, and research projects) with everyday moments of seeking to resist (e.g. in interpersonal encounters with teachers, students, and the system) whilst reflecting on the costs and benefits of each.

ELABORATION

As described in the tools «Eurocentrism» and «Neoliberal Compliance», Migra*BPoC are daily confronted with discrimination and racism in HEI. As research on migration and racism shows, migration control policies and Eurocentric notions of Europe as white and Christian, create the migrant and racialized 'Other' as different to the population considered as 'originally' belonging to this place (Gutierrez Rodriguez 1999).

Feminist Migrants (FeMigra 1992) have drawn attention to the construction of the population as 'migrant' through migration policies. Within this context, they have critique state programs and scholarship on migrants operating with the paradigms and call for 'assimilation' and 'integration'. Kien Nghi Ha (2010) has analyzed these state policies and scholarship as a new form of 'colonial pedagogy'. Black, People of Color, the immigrant population, and their relatives are addressed in the discourse of integration as subjects without any competencies and skills, lacking historical and political agency. Migra*BPoC resistance confronts these attempts of degrading, negating and disenfranchising their skills, competences, expertise, experiences, as well as political, intellectual, and artistic participation in the public discourses about Migra*BPoCs in German society. They create new vocabularies and intervene in the public analysis of society. Migra*BPoC's intellectuals in Germany are at the forefront of the analysis of the interlocking system of oppression and racism. This is also the case in other parts of Europe, Black, People of Colour and Migrant intellectuals, artists, activists and practitioners are creating understandings on living in resilience and resistant ways under oppressive conditions, created by racism and migration control policies (Ayim 2013; Gelbin, Konuk and Piesche 2000; Ogotuyeye, Ayim, and Schultze 1992).

Migra*BPoC political activism and political participations take place on different levels. While some research accentuates the participation in demonstrations, protests, citizens' initiatives, civic and voluntary work in clubs and associations, other research looks at the self-organizing and autonomous political activism of migrants and refugees. Political participation is thus as various and heterogeneous as Migra*BPoC resistance is.

An example of Black resistance in Germany is ISD e.V. (Initiative Schwarzer in Deutschland/Initiative of Black People in Germany) founded in 1986, and ADEFRA (Black Women in Germany), founded in 1994. The ISD has been actively working on the empowerment of people of African descent and Black People in Germany by drawing attention to racist discrimination, exploitation, disadvantage, and generating visibility on Black perspectives and presence in German society. This is done through educational work and various offers and projects that support the empowerment of black people (Generation ADEFRA 2020/ISD Bund e.V. 2020). ISD is succeeding in creating acknowledgment about Black Presence in Germany. The Black Presence in Germany is also related to German colonialism in East and Western Africa (Burundi, Cameroon, Namibia, Rwanda, Tanzania, and Togo)

between 1884-1919. Since gaining independence in 1990, Namibia has engaged in a process of seeking reparations from the German government, requesting compensation for the material damages and life loss incurred during Germany's colonial rule in German southwest Africa. It has lobbied for formal financial restitution in a number of different ways, most recently through an unsuccessful, but highly publicized, class-action suit brought against the German government in 2019 - the case that was conducted, and subsequently dismissed, in a US District Court in New York. In addition to these ongoing demands for financial recompense, the Namibian government has been looking for other types of concessions from Germany as well. Namibia has repeatedly demanded a formal and official apology from the German government, seeking accountability for Germany's criminal colonial conduct in German southwest Africa and admission of historical guilt for the violence perpetrated there. Yet, no reparations or apology has been officially communicated regarding the genocide against the Herero and Nama between 1904-1908 in Namibia. Groups like AfricaVenir, Berlin-Postkolonial e.V., AK Panafrikanismus e.V. – Bündnis Decolonize München and Tanzania Network e.V. as well as the ISD and ADEFRA have been standing in solidarity with demands for reparations from the global South. In 2011, 20 human remains of Herero and Nama were handed over to a Namibian delegation. In 2014 and in August 2018 remains of several Ovaherero/Ovambanderu and Nama were handed over to a Namibian delegation. The remains came from both public and private collections in Germany. Many more human remains are still in Germany's research hospitals and archives. The active support and campaigning in Germany have strengthened the position of the Namibian side.

Tools like interventions, media outreaches, inquiries to the German Parliament were used to increase the pressure on the German government to deal with the topic.

In the fight against everyday and institutional racisms in the juridical and police system in Germany has got further attention through the murders committed by the National Socialist Underground (NSU), a neo-Nazi terrorist group, supported by an estimated 100 to 200 people throughout Germany - including undercover police and members of functionaries of extreme right-wing parties (check: <https://www.nsu-watch.info/2017/03/the-nsu-case-ingermany/>). The NSU murdered 10 persons and made 43 attempted murders and three bombings. Between 2000 and 2007, the NSU murdered Enver Şimşek (9.9.2000, Nuremberg), Abdurrahim Özüdoğru (13.6.2001, Nuremberg), Süleyman Taşköprü (27.6.2001, Hamburg-Bahrenfeld), Habil Kılıç (29.8.2001, Munich-Ramersdorf), Mehmet Turgut (25.2.2004, Rostock-Toitenwinkel), İsmail Yaşar (9.5.2005, Nuremberg), Theodoros Boulgarides (15.6.2005, Munich), Mehmet Kubaşık (4.4.2006, Dortmund), Halit Yozgat (6.4.2006, Kassel), Michèle Kiesewetter (25.4.2007). The murders of these Turkish, Kurdish and Greek entrepreneurs of a small flower, internet and kebab stores and the German policewoman were treated by the Bavarian police as crimes committed by a 'Turkish Mafia'.

Only after the engagement of the relatives of the victims, the right-wing connection and their link to the German intelligence service were addressed. Until today, despite the condemnation of the murderers, no justice has been done. Still, the degree of the involvement of the German secret service in it remains uncovered.

After the NSU was uncovered and at the beginning of the defendants' court proceedings, various civil society and local organizations were founded, such as the watch blog NSU-Watch, which critically accompanied the educational work, wanted to initiate the process of coming to terms with the past and processes of social change and, above all, campaigned for the commemoration of the victims of the NSU (Schultze 2020).

In 2017 about 100 people participated in the organization of an «NSU tribunal» under the title «NSU complex dissolve» in Cologne. The aim of the Tribunal was and is to expose and denounce the terrorist organization's links with the German state and the structural racism anchored in Germany and to bring about change. Furthermore, the focus is on the victims and their relatives, who have been given the opportunity to share their stories and their lives and to portray the suffering that has been inflicted on them.

The debates on institutional racism have also taken place in education. Especially in the education sector, Migra*BPoCs are confronted with many hurdles and difficulties. As it was made clear in the Giessen's workshops, international students, German students with an alleged migration biography as well as German Black and People of Colour in Germany, experience some levels of discrimination, but also fellow students and lecturers.

Migra*BPoCs are often forced to justify themselves. For example, explaining why they wear religious or traditional clothes or from where they «really» come from. When Migra*BPoC describes these statements as discriminatory and racist, they often experience not being taken seriously, that the experience is trivialized or that it is ridiculed. Many whites are unaware of their own privileges and show certain blindness to the everyday racism that takes place on an individual, institutional and structural level against Migra*BPoCs. Since they themselves are not affected, there are shallow and seldom reflections on the reality of the life of Migra*BPoC.

A predominant Eurocentrism is also evident at the structural level. Migra*BPoCs are underrepresented in teaching. In 2012, only 6% of the professorships in Germany were filled with people with a migration biography, 80% of whom were white Europeans (see Tool Eurocentrism) (Gutiérrez 2012: 4). If the generation of theories and knowledge is seen as a social debate, the consequences of the exclusion of Migra*BPoC from this process become clear. Although they are a fundamental part of society, their point of view, habitat and knowledge are not taken into consideration in this process. This is mainly due to the more difficult access to academic networks and resources. It remains to be questioned, therefore, to what extent social theories and knowledge actually reflect society when mainly only a certain and small part of the population produces them (Gutiérrez 2014: 86). This also affects the structure and content of curricula of the study program, which often is also based on Eurocentric and racist attitudes (Gerstlauer 2015).

All the more important are the different types of resistance through which the victims of discrimination and racism can communicate their realities of life and thereby not only empower

themselves but also initiate social change.

The project University of Colour in Amsterdam, consisting of students of the University of Amsterdam, tries not only to point out those Eurocentric and racist structures in HEI but also is committed to “decolonize the university [...] to create a more balanced university at both curricular and demographic level that includes non-Eurocentric perspectives and ideas” (UoC 2015). They demand a realistic representation of their society, in particular Migra*BPoC, people of all sexualities and genders in university. In this way, the university evolves into a more democratic system and would develop a positive impact on knowledge production. In practical terms, this could entail a diversification of university curricula to include more non-Western scholarship and literature, funding and support for outreach programs that aim to help people overcome structural barriers to education, and efforts to diversify academic staff to better represent the LGBTQIA+, disabled, coloured, and other minority communities” (UoC 2015).

The NUS Black Students Campaign National Students Survey from the UK shows that 42% of students are convinced that the curriculum does not address and includes issues such as discrimination, equality and diversity. 34% of the students said that they could not contribute their experience and perspective as a BPoC student to lectures, seminars and tutor meetings (UCL 2015).

The curriculum is dominated by “white ideas’ by ‘white authors’” which can be considered as “a result of colonialism that has normalized whiteness and made blackness invisible” (Peters 2015: 642).

HEIs are not only places where discrimination and racism take place but are also essential of “reproducing white privilege (...) through misinterpretations of history and the ‘othering’ of minorities, shaping both white and non-white subjectivities and identities” (Peters 2015: 643).

At University College London (UCL) a campaign was founded called “Why is my curriculum white?”. This campaign seized on those critiques to raise awareness about the topic and to force decolonization of the curriculum (Hussain 2015).

In Germany on Twitter, the hashtag #schauhin was trending in 2013. Under this hashtag, people tweeted their experiences with everyday racism. The intention of the initiator of the hashtag action, Kübra Gümüşay, was not only to uncover and draw attention to the everyday occurrence of racism but also to offer the victims a platform where they can be heard, network and exchange ideas. This could have an empowering effect on those concerned. Two years later the university groups People of Color Mainz and Frankfurt am Main took up this hashtag and initiated the hashtag action #CampusRassismus. In doing so, they focused on the racist and discriminatory experiences of students at the university. Many students took the opportunity to report on their everyday discriminatory and racist experiences during their studies (fair weather 2015). Moreover, it was claimed that in German Universities intercultural and political topics were often lectured by White people.

Discriminatory structures become visible through such hashtag actions. Students affected by racism and discrimination are thus given a platform to share and make their experiences visible. But it also shows these students that they are not alone with their experiences and gives them the opportunity to network with each other (Gerstenlauer 2015/Lüpke-Naberhaus 2016).

Migra*BPOC Resistance is an essential part of the fight against discrimination and racism in society. It gives a public sphere to people who feel overlooked and overheard in our society, excluded and perceived as «foreign» and left alone with all this. This can facilitate social change. But it also gives people the opportunity to share their experiences with others with similar ones and to realize that they are not alone. The way discrimination and racism are dealt with (see Neoliberal Compliance) is individual, as is the choice and manner of resistance.

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