

Disciplining the White Other and the Figure of the Jew

"We must be wakeful for a new anti-Semitism, sometimes too easily trivialized.
We must be wakeful for a new anti-Zionism that is a hidden anti-Semitism
that in reality has not accepted the existence of the state of Israel,
even sixty years after its foundation. Europe cannot turn its back on Israel.
For Israel is linked to the history of Europe, for more than one reason.
We cannot speak about the foundation of the Jewish State without mentioning the Holocaust.
There is more, the dream of a new Eretz Yisrael was born in Europe,
in the hearts and minds of Theodor Herzl and his followers in the 19th century.
And since many centuries, in many thousands of European Jewish households, Pesach, the Jewish feast of
Easter, ends with the wish: "Next year in Jerusalem!"

- Belgian Prime Minister Yves Leterme (2008)

My inquiry tackles the question how the Figure of the Jew¹ is stipulated to further racial stratification within German society as well as beyond (Europe). The main sites of my anthropological field research of my PhD have been in Berlin, "the capital of the most powerful of the states that dominate the construction of Europe" (Balibar, 2003: 2). In this paper however, I will attempt to tackle what can be called the disciplining of the White Other (the "*bad* White") through a critical reading of (left-wing) European intellectuals. The *bad* White is, as Dyer believes, in fact the biggest threat to Whiteness. Through analyzing Western movies he came to conclude that "[t]o make non-whites the greatest threat would accord them qualities of will and skill, of exercising spirit, which would make them the equivalent of white people" (1997: 35). Hence, this argument tries to engage a 'problem orientated debate' of transnational Western White intellectuals that serves, as I claim, to re-center White European fantasies and narratives or a *self-righteous* (transnational) Whiteness through stipulating the Figure of the Jew as one of the central narratives to achieve that.

Having said this, in this paper I want to engage the critical idea that The Figure of The (European/Ashkenazi) Jew troubles the post-colonial dichotomy "between colonizer and subaltern" (Presner, 2007: 156) and thus also our belief that Whiteness can only be (fully) inhabited by "Christians". What is put on the borders ("gatekeepers") of (European) Whiteness (sexuality, ethnicities, class, etc.) might be more elusive for the

¹ As in an ideological signifier, which can entail various – sometimes also random – positions/representations: (Anti-) Anti-Semitism, Israel, Judeo-Christian values, Europe, class/capitalism, Judaism and/or Christianity, the Holocaust, religion, under-civilized/over-civilized, etc.

study of the *racialized phenomena* of Whiteness (Frankenberg, 1993: 231-233), than to re-center Whiteness through an analysis of “blame” (Bonnett, 1996: 153).

For outsiders, the talk about fighting anti-Semitism in Germany does not necessarily seem to warrant any problematic attitude, considering the fact that (Nazi) Germany skillfully perpetuated a genocide against an estimated population of six Million people of Jewish descent during World War II. Understandably so, there is also no other topic as hotly debated, emotively cared for and politically fought in Germany as Anti-Semitism (“hatred” against Jews). Yet, as is claimed in this research, this ostensible “just cause” that post-WWII Germany relentlessly fathoms also has its pitfalls next to its apparent good will and thus needs to be questioned further.

How people however understand the definitions of or the origins of anti-Semitism, race, racism and their genealogical legacy shall be tackled in the following parts.

Anti-Anti-Semitism or Anti-Racism?

So far, several scholars and critics have argued that Philo-Semitism (“love and idealization“ of Jews/Judaism) is just the reversal of a hidden Anti-Semitism (Stern: 1998, Goldhagen, 1997: 58), whereas others have argued that Philo-Semitism is in fact what served Jews to live a more or less ordinary life in Europe and helped them to eventually survive (Rappaport: 1980, Edelstein: 1982).

Whereas much public debate in Germany has been given to Anti-Semitism, very little public debate has been put on Philo-Semitism or the even more troublesome question in what way Philo-Semitism and Anti-Semitism might even be two different sides of the same functional coin? But what is that coin then, if one doesn’t simply want to replace Philo-Semitism with Anti-Semitism and also does not want to treat Philo-Semitism as something positive? How does the Philo-/Anti-Semitism double-bind work and whom/what does it serve? How can Western Europeans want to ‘emancipate’/‘integrate’ a people at one point in time (Enlightenment²), then aim to eliminate them (Nazi Germany), and eventually pledge (unconditional) support for their

² The *HaSkala* had been the equivalent (European) intra-Jewish debate over these ‘outside’ impositions of a fantasized racial narratives of integration and emancipation of European Jewry.

nationalist endeavor on foreign lands (Post-WWII)? Over a period over the past 250 years, Jews in European lands have seen the entire possible span of attitudes that a people can be confronted with – from isolation/ghettoization, to integration, to genocide, to full-fledged support (at times also simultaneously). Furthermore, before and all along Wilhelminian Germany, Davis claims that Germany produced much more scientific knowledge about ‘Jewish difference’ (primarily pathologies, anatomy, physical anthropology), than any other nation until the turn of the 20th century (2012: 15).

Yet, marginalized in an overall discussion of today’s European racial attitudes toward Jews seems to be the way the discussion about the Figure of the Jew serves to solidify an idea and identity of *what* Europe is and *how* it is supposed to be recognized and defended. Furthermore, it is also not discussed in what way this narrative serves to racialize Muslims in Europe or anti-colonial People of Color activists and Anti-Zionist Jews.

After all, Jews were not the only people discriminated or even killed in German modern history³. German colonial intellectuals, for instance, advocated the annihilation of so-called “inferior races” long before the Holocaust (Warmbold, 1989: 125-7) and the concept of *Lebensraum*, so popular during Nazi-reign, was developed by German pro-colonial groups (Smith, 1986: 95) long before Hitler was even born. In fact, Césaire (1955) even claims that European fascism, until WWII only practiced in the colonies by White Europeans, came back home to Europe during that time. The latter is his explanation of the outrage over the genocide on Europe’s Jewry, as opposed to the millions of colonial death who have still primarily gone unmentioned in public avowal.

One can safely attest that the archive of historical research into German and European colonial rule is sufficient and – at least in most academic circles – widely acknowledged. Its representation in public discourse or education over its past and ongoing legacy,

³ Sinti and Roma in Germany during the Nazis period, and the Herero, Nama and Maji-Maji (all in the South West German colony) were all decimated to a small portion of their original size. The first German concentration camp was on Shark Island and Germany’s first genocide took place in South-West Germany (Zimmerer, 2011) - today’s Namibia - during Germany’s short but brutal colonial empire lasting from 1884-1920.

however, is still mirrored by silence in Germany (Ha, Al-Samarai, Mysoreka, 2007; Kilomba, 2008; El-Tayeb, 2011; Rodriguez, Steyerls, 2012).

It is thus reasonable to assume, that the Figure of the Jew seems to be of utmost importance to what White Germanness, Europe and (White) Europeanness means. Any attempt to breach the gap between Germany's use of the accusation of Anti-Semitism to, for instance, discredit any critique of Germany's treatment of its migrants and People of Color or its staggering support for Zionism and colonialism, is met with a rigorous self-defense of an Anti-Semitism accusation: The latest prominent examples in academic circles are Judith Butler in 2012, who was called an Anti-Semite by individuals and organizations (including the Council of Jews in Germany) called for a boycott of her person when she came to receive the prestigious Adorno-Prize; Jasbir Puar who came to Germany to speak on Homonationalism, Palestine, Zionism and racism and who was severely attacked along the same lines, but went on to publish an article about it (2011: 140-141); and the latest example is the British national Brian Klug who caused uproar⁴ for being invited to open the international conference on Anti-Semitism at the Jewish museum – his faux-pas has been his controversial stance on claiming that the coining of a “New Anti-Semitism” rising in the Europe is used to disguise the fact of racism toward migrants and People of Color and to delegitimize any critique of Zionism or Israeli politics (2004; see also Lerman, 2002).

The “New Anti-Semitism” as it is called in policy discourse in Germany as well as in European politics thus also coincides with the fantasy of a “New Europe”. The latter being the platform for liberated (queer, female) Muslims (see also Puar, 2007; El-Tayeb, 2011), free Homosexuals, emancipated women, and, as a new, yet decade-long add-on, free Jewish life in a democratic Europe/Germany that needs to be protected against the enemy abroad (Israel's hateful Arab neighbors) and within (Muslim Anti-Semites inside Europe).

⁴ A long publication of several authors including strong defamatory language that cites his work incorrectly and connects it with Fundamentalist Islamist (Terrorist) groups, amongst other things. “*The Berlin International Center for the Study of Antisemitism (BICSA): Dossier on Brian Klug in Berlin, November 8 – 9, 2013*”. Retrievable online: <http://bicsa.org/wp-content/uploads/BICSA-International-Scholars-criticize-Brian-Klug-ZfA-EVZ-Jewish-museum-Berlin-Nov-20133.pdf>

Along with this fantasy of a morally superior, culturally more advanced ‘Western civilization’ comes the equivocal avowal of famous European public (so-called left-wing) intellectuals and academics, embracing ideas of Europe’s cultural advancements, calling for a revival and defense of the latter. It is in this niche that I want to locate my search for the meaning of the Figure of the Jew and the creation of German – and by extension European – Whiteness. I want to trouble a construction of a Whiteness that is deeply conflicted due to its own (self-) racialization: a European/German Whiteness that is profoundly *racialized itself and thus racist*, giving leeway to supra-/nationalist pride and feelings of cultural superiority on the one hand, but one that is on the other hand also deeply burdened with the post-colonial double-bind of racial disavowal/foreclosure and shame (Chin, Eley, et al., 2009).

Eurocentrism or Re-Centering (European) Whiteness?

In Critical Nationalism Studies, Gender Studies, Critical Race Studies or Psychoanalysis it has been established that human beings (in modern times) have used history to establish their identity in the ‘now’. Nationalists, Racists or Neurotics take from and project onto the past what serves their perspective and goals of the present and possible future (Lane, 1998: 20) and repress what hinders that narrative. This retroactive search for meaning, made possible through processes of commemoration (conscious and unconscious), does not always need to reestablish the same nationalist, racist or neurotic identity (boundaries). It can also break old meanings of identification, leading to a new process of engagement with the world.

In his 1991 piece on “Europe’s Other Self” Hall already sees the emergence of a new supra-national Europe, creating itself out of itself. The Other – migrants or People of Color – simply serve as a (racist) metaphor for this new Europe to reproduce itself from within, as he writes, “both materially and spiritual, the conditions for the next phase of development. [...*In order*] to produce [...] the circumstances of her own evolution from within her own body.” (18) Similarly, White (2010) writes that there is nothing like a European identity, but that it always has to create and re-/invent itself without any fixed spatial or temporal definitions. Yet, the only identity he marks as ‘Europe’s essential nature’ is anti-Semitism and racism, whereby Europe’s challenge is to fully attain self-

knowledge about it, in order to live up to its fantasized goal of representing humanity (9).

Yet, the continuous downplaying or even blind-spot of colonialism's influence on European identity and the lingering racism today in public and private life, leaves one pondering whether the recourse into history does not (yet again) serve to maintain the status quo of a German or European supra-nation that is now again benevolent in educating abroad and at home. European public intellectuals, amongst them also 'left-wing' academics, seem to embrace that idea, based on an imago of Europe's progress.

Balibar writes in "We, the people of Europe" (2003) not only of the need of Europe to reinvent itself, if it does not want to become 'impossible'. Yet, in his writing, albeit mentioning colonialism, his take is that the most important political significance for the naming of Europe was that of a constitution for the balance of powers in the 17th-18th century between the European nation-states (6). He dismisses that the "Turkish menace" (6), which led to the Treaty of Westphalia (1648) has been the reason, or even the common colonial experience and struggle, but rather, the internal struggle over two conceptions of what Europe should be: The republican conception of the French versus the conception of civil rights propagated by the English and Dutch. Interestingly, he also points out that the reason the Balkans have become the new border of Europe is because "genocidal" aspirations, springing for racial and ethnic ideologies is not what Europe can tolerate on "its own soil" anymore, "not only for moral reasons, but above all to preserve its political future" (4).

Similarly, the coming together of two of the most important contemporary French and German intellectuals, Habermas and Derrida (2003), attest it as important to create a New Europe with a common will in foreign policy [*sic*], "where the citizens of one nation must regard the citizens of another nation as fundamentally 'one of us'" (293). They also believe that Europe is primarily known to non-Europeans in its own struggle with itself (religion, authority, class, urbanism), which however has been overcome by a continuous "acknowledgement of difference" (294) and can thus serve again as the foundation for a new EU identity. A "global reflexive European policy" is propagated when Europeans

“could learn from the perspective of the defeated [*colonized*] to perceive themselves in the dubious role of victors who are called to account for the violence of a forcible and uprooting process of modernization [*sic*]. This could support the rejection of Eurocentrism, and inspire the Kantian hope for a global domestic policy [*sic*]” (297).

Already in 1999, Bourdieu and Wacquant set out to a specific critique of the ‘globalization’ and ‘universalizing’ of US American ideology and its social “problems” (46) such as ‘race’ in their piece “Imperialist Reason”. The problem of ‘race’ is according to both a “US *folk-concept*” (48) and, defiantly, they attest that “the imported concept adds nothing to the knowledge of European societies [*sic*]” (49). Using Brazil as a counter-narrative (why Brazil and what the connections are, is left unmentioned) they reject the notion of colonialism for racial inequalities/perceptions, rather coining it “forms of ethnoracial domination” (48) in different countries. The reader is left to believe that also in Brazil, there are apparently no socio-political historical events, leading to such society.

Finally, one of the most prominent and also controversial of European public thinkers, Žižek, came out in 1998 with his “Leftist Plea for ‘Eurocentrism’”. Albeit his stimulating engagement of (Lacanian) psychoanalysis, where he repeats its old wisdom that knowledge itself is not liberating (1000), he – like his other European colleagues – believes that the enactment of true (European?) universality is nowhere as visible as “in the case of African Americans in the United States” (1001). Following – maybe unconsciously (?) – Bourdieu and Wacquant, he also believes that the US model of social co-habitation with its identitarian and “‘wild’ demands for social justice” (1008) and representation is becoming the truly universal model, and not France with its republican universalism (1007). The social statement he attests for this American-gone-global “end-of-ideology politics” is for him to be found in the “true European legacy from ancient Greece onwards” (1009).

Much more can be said about each of these texts. Interestingly, what connects all of the aforementioned thinkers is their anxiety to think Europe anew, or at least, to recover something that has been “lost” or needs “re-building” and their distrust – if not even dislike – of the United States of America. Most importantly however, those writers show

us a) the US as rather a “bad example” without links to Europe, instead of it being a colonial European offshoot of (settler-) colonial ventures. This is probably the most important starting point of their perspective in that it is the actual *foreclosure*⁵, to reference Žižek and his love for psychoanalysis, that all writers take part in. (b) Without seeing its colonial common history, the application of ‘race’ as an analysis for social ailments just happens to be ‘there’, but not here, in Europe, where everything is (still) different. (c) All writers see the US as a threatening (“imperial”), or at least problematic (“post-political”) globalizing missionary of its ideas and societal problems. The projection deflects not only from reality; it might also be assumed that this narcissistic hatred of the (White) other is strongest when it meets its almost similar, yet different, counter-part. This ‘narcissism of minor differences’, according to Freud (1930), fuels „a convenient and relatively harmless satisfaction of the inclination to aggression.“⁶ (72), whereas for Lacan it was envy that drove this type of hatred. (d) Finally, and most importantly, we find Hall’s argument that Europe creates itself out of itself validated. Colonialism, or the “losers of modernization” are mentioned in passing – serving as background narrative for ‘the real’ story (Morrison, 1992).

Conclusion

The ‘just cause’ of anti-Anti-Semitism in education (and in immigration policies) has to be viewed critically. There is no reason to downplay European Jewish suffering in Europe, but in order to fully embrace a – what the authors seem to call for – an egalitarian universalism, questions have to be raised in what way such dramatic past can serve to silence and further racialize other minorities inside and people outside of Europe.

The disavowal of European colonialism in today’s Western racialized societies (including US racism) has to be grappled with. I claim, that one narrative to unsettle Europe’s ease to dismiss colonial racism is that of White European anti-Semitism, following Fanon’s, Arendt’s and Césaire’s arguments. Davis (2012) claims that the

⁵ Foreclosure/Disavowal – facts or possibilities that the speaker/writer no longer sees as part of reality. And hence are of no importance for further inclusion in an analysis. Foreclosure works through repression.

⁶ The following sentences states: „In this respect the Jewish people, scattered everywhere, have rendered most useful services to the civilizations of the countries that have been their hosts.“

examples of German Jews in the colonial German empire “show that colonialism gave rise to a new identity, *the white colonizer*, in which both ‘Jews’ and ‘Gentiles’ could partake” (23, my own emphasis). The double-bind of the endeavor played out, as we know, when Nazi Germany wanted to reverse the more inclusionary racial contract to its – maybe (?) – original version (Mills, 1997: 78).

After WWII Europeans, and especially Germans, have enough knowledge about the evils of racial hatred. In fact, as we see now emerging, is the trend to view Anti-Semitism and the Holocaust not only as building pillars of a new imagined European identity (Littoz-Monnet, 2011), but also as signifier to ward off internal and external security threats, notably since 2001, converging around the Figure of the Muslim (Schiffauer, 2008). With this narrative of the Figure of the Jew (partially inventing a Christian-Jewish European cultural heritage), Germans and Europeans are able to provide the new (supra-) nation with a sense of ‘primitive origins’ (Povinelli, 2011: 36) that retains its European narrative and does not need to travel to the (former and present) colonies anymore and, most importantly, a narrative and “time” from which they have progressed.

The Americanization of Holocaust memory (Espiritu, Wolf, 2013), the universalizing of it (Huyssen, 2003) and the usage of it in pinkwashing Germany (Yilmaz-Günay, Wolter, 2013) has been written about. The next step is to show how these universalizing strategies of one racist narrative (anti-Semitism) is embraced by Europeans (when talking about racism, the Jewish plight in Europe is one of Žižek’s primary examples) with the goal to, as I claim, maintain its material and intellectual power over the fantasy of Whiteness. Moreton-Robinson, Casey, and Nicoll’s concept of transnational Whiteness seems to help in that analysis (2008). They believe it to be a global alliance of industrialized nations in which White people are culturally and economically dominant, position themselves as protectors of democracy along with a race blind ideology. Albeit Whiteness having different local contexts, it nevertheless exceeding fixed binaries of identity and nation, reinscribing social hierarchies through national imaginaries and their transgression along with a claim of moral superiority. Virtue, as property or currency, is used to defend and perpetuate White dominance, functioning through reason and goodness (ix-xvi). In this vain, it might not only be, as Berskanmaz proposes

that this German (provincial) exceptionalism⁷ is built on ‚excusing’ and thus ‚re-centering’ Germany for it’s inherent (White) Otherness, due to the Holocaust when it comes to highlighting the figure of the Jew. Instead, as I would like to think through, it might be the general and inherent logic of Whiteness, along with the concept of transnational Whiteness, that (transnational) Whiteness always exceptionalizes itself and therein *uplifts itself into universality*.

Within this exceptionalism, however, also rests the possibility to discipline Other Whites (Europeans, lower-classes, White US Americans, Ashkenazi Jews, Eastern Europeans, European communists, etc.) in their ideological deviance. After all, Whiteness is a racial ideology that needs border-patrolling and disciplining, judgments and critique constantly. Germany is of pivotal importance for this White (transnational) narrative, for no other European atrocity is recognized by (White) Europeans to be of such global, universal, and thus, European significance.

Finally, it might also be interesting to follow the thought of how much the narrative of “regeneration” has not only informed the body politics of European Zionist Jewry (Presner, 2007), but also in how far the Figure of the Jew through the discourse of (German) exceptionalism, enables Europe and its White transnational allies to uphold the narrative to regenerate their fantasized “damaged” states-of-being.

⁷ “German Exceptionalism reifies ‚Germans’ as ‚eternal perpetrators’ as well Jewish subjects as ‚eternal victims’. German Exceptionalism is the consequence of and the point of departure for a white nationalist narrative that reproduces the German nation as white, often epitomized in ‚because-of-our-past’ rhetorics. This very discourse marginalizes and excludes post- and anti-colonial narratives; it (re-) centers the white German subject within the nation and draws demarcations of who belongs to the nation.” (Unpublished. Do not cite!)

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