

How to Unlearn White Supremacy?

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Abstract: The article pursues the question of how solidarity between white and non-white people can be possible in the face of centuries of dehumanization of non-white life. It focuses on the construction of whiteness as supposedly 'superior' and the question of how whiteness can be unlearned. The authors base their reflections on the philosophical concept Ubuntu, in order to clarify what would be necessary to escape from this deep imbalance back to a humanity that is not subject to hierarchization.

Keywords: Antiracism, Whiteness, Critical Race Theory, Postcolonialism, Ubuntu

Wie kann weiße Überlegenheit verlernt werden?

Zusammenfassung: Der Beitrag verfolgt die Frage, wie Solidarität zwischen weißen und nicht-weißen Menschen angesichts jahrhunderterlanger Entmenslichung nicht-weißen Lebens möglich sein kann. Es steht die Konstruktion von Weißsein als vermeintlich 'überlegen' im Fokus und die Frage, wie Weißsein verlernt werden kann. Die Autor*innen stützen ihre Überlegungen auf dem philosophischen Konzept Ubuntu, um zu verdeutlichen, was nötig ist, um aus diesem tiefen Ungleichgewicht wieder zu einer Menschlichkeit zu kommen, die keiner Hierarchisierung unterliegt.

Schlagwörter: Antirassismus, Weißsein, Rassismuskritik, Postcolonialismus, Ubuntu

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Global social relations are characterised by unequal relations of power and dominance, which in turn result in unequal opportunities for participation, including or excluding people (groups) in various, mostly interwoven ways. This is true at both national and international levels. Social inequalities are based on the ordinal ranking of people (groups) into social categories, which are not only anchored in purported unambiguity and binaries, but are also linked to images and attributions. Categorisations of people (groups) are often akin to classification practices embedded in capitalist logics in which processes of hierarchisation and competition are implicit. In this way, people (groups) are upgraded or devalued, leading to corresponding access to or denial of resources. Accordingly, relations of inequality operate at an individual, institutional, structural level, and lead to differential exclusions or inclusions depending on the social context.

This paper will focus on the hierarchisation of humanity through the category of 'race'. From a postcolonial perspective, racism will be analysed as a colonial continuity. It will be shown that the systematic dehumanisation of black and non-white people, their oppression, enslavement, and extermination during slavery, colonialism and apartheid continue today – albeit in different ways. The chosen theoretical framework of postcolonialism and its significance for the analysis of human hierarchisation is explained by way of introduction.

Our focus is on the category white, the reason being that, from the beginning of colonialism, 'the others' were constructed from a white, supposedly 'objective' perspective. Significantly for our own purposes, as a result there emerged unanimity in the description and pathologisation of "Africans in general in order to then define the European as inherently different" (Lomba 1998: 137f. cited in Murove 2012: 38). Thus, for over 500 years, the notion of white supremacy has become firmly established, with white people and their experiences standing for 'human nature' (Gordon 2022: 27) and being placed at the top of the human hierarchy as an unquestioned norm. We examine what consequences this centuries-old narrative of superiority has from the perspective of people who have been constructed as 'less human'. The article concludes with the question: how can equality become a reality between people who are still individually and structurally dehumanised by the colonial-racist systems on the one hand, and those who benefit from this power imbalance? And how can white supremacy be unlearned?

In tackling these questions, the article takes up the philosophy of Ubuntu from southern Africa, as a path to explore more "human" relations in spite of racist structures. (cf. Ngomane 2019; cf. Murove 2014). Against the backdrop of continuing white supremacy, the opportunities for and limits of solidarity between white and non-white people in the face of continuing colonial-racist dehumanisation will be discussed with reference to Ubuntu.

1 Racism as colonial continuity

In the following, the focus is on colonialism and the construction of ‘the others’ as “immutably different” (Castro Varela/Dhawan 2015: 22). A logic that was inherent in all colonisation processes and survives to this day in the form of white supremacy and the associated structural discrimination against non-white people. Especially in the German context, it seems necessary to explicitly name racism or white supremacy as a colonial continuity, since the colonial history of Germany (and other former colonial powers) and its consequences have not been sufficiently considered and dealt with until today. Mostly, in the context of racism, people still talk about ‘the others’ instead of consistently addressing whiteness and the consequences that result globally from this supposed superiority. Even though critical race theory and postcolonial studies have become established in the university context, (global) inequalities are still not sufficiently discussed against the backdrop of colonialism and the question of what centuries of tyranny have done to the (former) colonisers. The question of which historical events are commemorated in what form is shaped by the “mental and emotional self-location in a historical landscape [that] has been marked by colonial and postcolonial asymmetries for five hundred years” (Wiedemann 2022: 78f.). This is also a question of which life is considered ‘valuable’ and which ‘less valuable’.

1.1 The coloniality of humanity

According to Young, Colonialism can be understood as a large-scale European project and as “a system that created rigid structures of profound inequality at many levels, justified ideologically by the doctrine of race” (2020: 4). In addition to the exploitation and oppression of colonised subjects, European colonialism also entailed the “political and cultural subjugation of colonised people” (Rodríguez 2008: 275). As late as the 1930s, European colonial powers controlled just under 85 % of global land areas (cf. *ibid.*), and 90 % in Africa in the 19th century (Statista 2022). That occupation of land, resources, people and minds still has “consequences for the world’s power structures and the lives and ways of thinking of people in different parts of the world [today]” (Liebel 2017:11). European colonialism in all its facets laid the foundation for globally unequal geopolitical power structures that have been established since the 15th century and continue in a fashion that “can also be described as neo-colonial” (*ibid.*).

The analysis of colonial expansion, European nation-building and border demarcation, combined with the hierarchisation of humanity based on skin colour and the notion of human ‘races’, illustrate “the interaction of material and discursive conditions in the making and becoming of the world” (Rodríguez 2008: 275). From a postcolonial perspective, therefore, not only colonial continuities have to be analysed and made visible, but also the effectiveness of language. Language in this sense is not seen as a means of ‘objectively’ describing the world outside; instead, it is embedded in (neo-)colonial history, and is what Gutierrez Rodriguez describes as a means of “producing reality” through

which “an asymmetrical relationship is perpetuated” (ibid.: 274.). Language therefore “constitutes a representational system on the basis of which spaces of performativity and acts of intelligibility are initiated and grounded” (ibid.). So, too, is the idea of human ‘races’, which Stuart Hall described as an “ideological discourse” (cf. Hall 2000) to illustrate the discursive part of racism, a significant aspect in the construction of a ‘superior’, ‘modern’, ‘civilised’, Europe,¹ while at the same time entailing the devaluation of all others (cf. Hall 1992; cf. Mbembe 2017; cf. Mignolo 2009). To describe today which society is considered ‘modern’, ‘developed’, ‘civilised’, the term ‘the West’ is used, which shows that “‘the West’ is a historical, not a geographical, construct” (Hall 1992: 136). Referring again to Stuart Hall ‘the West’ can be seen as a construct that describes societies that “arose at a particular historical period – roughly, during the sixteenth century [...] [t]hey were the result of a specific set of historical processes – economic, political, social, and cultural” (ibid.). It follows that the concept of ‘the West’ is indebted to a classification system that enables social systems to be compared and produces supposed ‘knowledge’ about a group.

The narrative that ‘western’ countries are civilised and were responsible for disseminating civilisation is what Aimé Césaire calls “the principal lie that is the source of all the others” (2021: 32) and points out “that out of all the colonial expeditions that have been undertaken, out of all the colonial statutes that have been drawn up, out of all the memoranda that have been dispatched by all the ministries, there could not come a single human value” (ibid.: 34). Nevertheless, the narrative that ‘the West’ stands for ‘civilisation’ makes clear that “the commonest curse is to be the dupe in good faith of a collective hypocrisy that cleverly misrepresents problems, the better to legitimise the hateful solutions provided for them” (ibid.: 32). These abominations continue to manifest themselves, among other things, in structural violence, such as the EU’s inhumane border regimes, which are justified by the need to protect Europe. A narrative that, given Europe’s brutal colonial history and the colonial continuities that have grown out of it, raises the question of who actually needs to be protected from whom? Also, the global vaccination injustice demonstrated during the COVID-19 pandemic met with little protest here in the ‘West’, thus illustrating the differential value placed on human lives. The assumption of being ‘more valuable’ and ‘more worthy of protection’ (cf. Garba/Ihring 2020) is still deeply influential.

1.2 Humanism – but only for a few

The concept of ‘race’, which originated in the animal kingdom, was thus transferred from European colonial powers to colonised humans. Starting from a white norm, ‘knowledge’ about people (groups) was generated from that time onwards, persisting for many centuries, based on the assumption that “the non-European peoples [...] were struck with an inferior being” (Mbembe 2017: 42). The encounters and later increasing ‘exploration’ of colonised subjects with and by white Europeans was thus shaped from the outset by constructing non-white people as ‘inferior’ human beings, demonstrating

that “European thought throughout its history has had an inherent tendency not to understand identity in terms of a shared belonging to one and the same world” (Mbembe 2017: 11). In the following, Mbembe’s idea will be taken up and explained in more detail. This requires a look at colonial history, as this is closely linked to the hierarchisation of humanity.

Colonialism cannot be considered without the long-lasting production of human ‘races’ and the “centuries of discursive struggles” (Stam/Shohat 2014: 65). Already in the 15th century, arguments were made on the basis of religion and politics when “Sepúlveda and Bartolomé de las Casas asked themselves whether Indians had souls and as a consequence enjoyed *derechos humanos* (‘human rights’)” (ibid.). The question of whether Black people were human at all was not a matter of controversy: they became “ultimate anti-human others”, without soul, without mind, which “frames our social relations, our intimacies and remains the immediate ground of living life in our present” (Walcott 2014: 96). Thus, discourses around the question of who is human have traversed the centuries, they “have been ‘available’ for a long time; past and present reverberate together; old debates anticipate and haunt the present” (Stam/Shohat 2014: 65).

In his article “Who speaks for the Human in Human Rights?” Walter Mignolo points out very clearly that the period of human rights declarations at the end of the 17th and the end of the 18th century in the US, UK and France was accompanied by a very narrow conception of ‘human being’ and ‘rights’ linked to national affiliation, gender, social origin, and free citizens (cf. Mignolo 2009). Moreover, ‘rationality’ became increasingly significant in defining personhood “and rationality was limited to what philosophers and political theorists of the Enlightenment said it was” (Mignolo 2009: 14). The idea that humans are male, white and free was also carried to the colonies and brought about the ‘civilisation’ of ‘the others’ along European lines, based on the “assuming (after Kant and Hegel’s canonization) that not only non-Christian religions were inferior, but that people of colour speaking languages non-derived from Greek and Latin were less human” (ibid.: 15). In the course of the ‘Enlightenment’ and the associated scientification of ‘knowledge’ through disciplines such as philosophy, medicine, biology and ethnology, this ‘knowledge’ was placed on a supposedly ‘objective’ basis. ‘Scientific’ proof that white and Christian people were superior to all others and that racism is part of modernity was called for. White superiority or the inferiority of non-white life was henceforth propagated in the form of racial theories and doctrine.

This colonial-racist ‘knowledge’, which has been laid down over centuries, is still anchored in people’s minds as well as in social structures and is reproduced at different levels, manifesting itself in new forms. Studies such as the “Afrozensus” published in 2020 and the study on anti-Muslim racism in Germany published by Mediendienst Integration (2021) make clear how negative the images and attributions to Black or Muslim-marked people still are today. Both studies show that Black and/or Muslim-marked people suffer experiences of non-belonging, devaluation, multiple discrimination, and structural racism. However, structural, and institutionalised racism subtly manifests itself as an integral part of socially established inequality that is difficult to grasp and prove. The ‘civilisation of the others’ today functions in a similarly ambivalent way to the manner it did previously:

the focus continues to be consistently on 'the others' and their supposed deficits, coupled with the need to provide them with "special promotion or support" (Riegel 2021: 431) instead of placing the focus on whiteness, on the supposed 'superiority' associated with it and the discriminatory structures that have thus emerged. What consequences ensue for the evaluation of 'the others'? Whiteness and its construction as 'superior', 'neutral', 'knowing' should be interrogated from this perspective. The perpetuation of the mythical narrative leads to the reproduction of white supremacy, as is exemplified by the way that racism is discussed today: "admitting that racism exists but denying its fundamental role in constructing global and local power structures" (Stam/Shohat 2014: 64).

1.3 White supremacy and the absence of empathy

"First we must study how colonisation works to decivilize the colonizer, to brutalize him in the true sense of the word, to degrade him, to awaken him to buried instincts, to covetousness, violence, race hatred, and moral relativism" (Césaire 2000: 35).

In the spirit of the anti-colonial Afro-Caribbean resistance fighter and politician Aimé Césaire, the following will focus on the legacy that centuries of constructing white superiority as 'better', 'more valuable', 'more civilised' and 'more developed' have left for posterity. The focus is not on individuals racialised as white as such, but rather on demonstrating the images and meanings that come to the mind of the "others" when they imagine whiteness (Gordon 2022: 28). According to Lewis Gordon, whiteness can be understood "as a consciousness" (ibid.) that is deeply shaped and still fed by the (unconscious) notion of being superior, one that is imposed on the world. With the onset of European expansion, whiteness was set as the 'norm' and white thinking, white experiences, white emotions, white actions were imagined as representative of all people or, as Gordon writes "[m]uch of what is taken to be the way women and men behave is about how white women and men behave" (2022: 27). Whiteness gives rise to privileges that Layla Saad describes as "unearned advantage that are granted because of one's whiteness or ability to 'pass' as white" (Saad 2020: 34). These privileges are not inherent and only make sense in the context of white supremacy; without the constructed system of white 'superiority', whiteness would be worthless (cf. ibid). The notion of white superiority, which persists to this day, also manifests itself in a lack of empathy (cf. Roig 2021; cf. Wiedemann 2022), as constructions of superiority fundamentally entail a lack of fellow feeling for those seen as less than and lacking in some qualities (Roig 2021: 145).

White supremacy is also effective as an "international power system that includes an ideology of white (broadly defined) racial superiority and its related sets of practices" (Beliso-De Jesús/Pierre 2019: 1548). This invisible and global matrix of white supremacy ensures that white people consider themselves more important than non-white people as a matter of course.

2 Ubuntu as a decolonial perspective

Before we discuss Ubuntu below, we want to look at our positioning in the context of 'race' and global inequality. We are two black people – located in the South and the North. One of us carries a western passport, one carries an African passport. This is important to mention, because whiteness is not the only way through which racism finds expression. The complexity of racism means that it goes hand-in-hand with differentiated access to mobility. Certain passports make it easy to move through the world, while possessing other passports functions in effect as a barrier against travel. Furthermore, the possession of certain passports grants privileges which allow some people racialised as non-white to be able to move more freely than other non-white people. And given the connection between the strength of a passport and the economic and political powers of a country, people who are racialised like those of us based in the North also have access to some privileges that result from the exploitation of racialised others in the rest of the world. This complexity means that one of us, as a privileged professor in Germany, poses a question concerning our right to draw on indigenous knowledge and publish it in an outlet based in the West. We have also subjected the article to a westernized system of peer review that often excludes knowledge from the Global South. We therefore grapple with what it means to bring indigenous knowledge into a western academy. Are we complicit in appropriation of non-Western knowledge systems reminiscent of the appropriation of resources from non-Western societies for the benefit of Western economies?

Nonetheless, we have still decided to deploy Ubuntu, for two reasons: firstly, because we think it is broadly effective in helping us rethink the instrumentalised nature of the takeover of human interactions by racialised capitalism. Secondly, because we believe its ethos is capable of undoing white supremacy and blinkered humanism that sees some as less human. Ubuntu's focus on human relations and interconnectedness challenges ideas of separation and exclusion. Referring to Achille Mbembe again: we know that we are all of one identity, which means an understanding of "identity in terms of a shared belonging to one and the same world". The push back against a narrow, exclusionary definition of humanity and towards a programmatic, equality and equity-based sociality are some of the other dimensions of Ubuntu that we find particularly appealing.

In the following, we want to address what it takes from the perspective of the racialised other to come to an equal relationship with the dominant group. From our perspective, whiteness as 'more valuable' needs to be actively and radically unlearned, as this notion has produced the hierarchisation of humanity; it perpetuates divisions and militates against solidarity. We do not know how active unlearning of white supremacy would work, but we want to think further about ways forward that draw on ideas from other non-white people and focus on Ubuntu as a decolonial philosophy and practice that literally stands for what we want in the future: to be equal human beings.

2.1 Ubuntu as decolonial philosophy

From a decolonial perspective, the term 'postcolonialism' is criticised for the fact that the prefix 'post' can be confusing, as it suggests an 'after' that does not exist, because "[c]oloniality is still with us [...]. From a decolonial perspective there is no outside of coloniality from where coloniality can be observed" (Mignolo 2014: 21). Decolonial perspectives have their origins in non-Western societies, they are located in the "Third World and [were] enacted by actors wanting liberation from Western Europe. Western Europe could not 'offer' at once to the rest of the world both oppression and liberation. Neither then, nor now" (ibid.: 22). Based on the fact that "colonialism is to be understood as the emergence of a 'global power matrix' that is still effective today" and that an essential part of this power matrix is "the dominance of European-influenced thinking in the sense of epistemic domination" (Schirilla 2018: 110), the focus is on dealing with domination and epistemic violence. Epistemic domination is evident, for example, in the notion that still exists today that "the first world has knowledge, the third world has culture; Native Americans have wisdom, Anglo Americans have science" (Mignolo 2009: 160). Following Mignolo, the idea of the "neutral point of observation" (ibid.) is no longer tenable today in view of European epistemic dominance and the power imbalance associated with it.

One way to counter centuries of dehumanisation of non-white life and epistemic violence is Ubuntu. Ubuntu, understood as a decolonial philosophy, has its origins in southern Africa. The eminent South African philosopher, Mogobe Ramose (1999) in his work entitled "African Philosophy through Ubuntu" argues that colonialism involves both physical conquest of territory by the coloniser, and a mental take-over of the conceptual lifeworld, intellectual production and the ability of the colonised to think for themselves by drawing on their histories and knowledge base (its entanglement with the rest of the World) to make sense of the world and of themselves. What Ramose gestures to can be summed up in the following formulation: That colonialism is a dual process headlined by conquest (often a European power extending its dominance and territorial possession over the conquered). This is often premised on an expansionary logic with the underlying motivation of economic accumulation. Territorial conquest is closely accompanied by intellectual conquest, whereby the knowledge of the conquered is alienated, denigrated and devalorised; the cumulative effect is that the conquered not only come to see themselves as unworthy of thinking for themselves but become intellectually dependent on the conqueror. Memory is the key to intellectual conquest and therefore the humanity of the conquered. The conquered comes as a thing that could be dispensed with at the whims of the conqueror. It is this that led to Hegel to assert that history bypassed Africa and that Africa is a place of intellectual lack (Hegel 1885/translated version). The binaries and antinomies of people with history and people without history is not the preserve of Hegel. Ramose contends that European Philosophy is built on the foundations of its self-referentiality, which by necessity sees the other as lower, requiring upliftment. Colonisation was also associated with presenting Eurocentric 'knowledge' as 'unique' and 'true' and declaring it to be valid for all people (Hegel 1873).

Ubuntu, on the other hand, proceeds from the inherent humanity and inalienable value of all. To be human is not something that can be denied or ascribed on the basis of ancestry, phenotype, or history. Instead, it is a given. And the quality of a person's personhood is one which is dependent on their commitment to the wellbeing of others. The starting point of Ubuntu is to consider and treat human beings "as originally a being in relations" (Murove 2014: 37). Wanting and needing to be in relationship is based on the assumption that all people have a need for recognition and belonging. The relationship with other people is existential, which means that Ubuntu "contradicts the idea that a person can only achieve something through their own efforts, as we are all interconnected" (Ngomane 2019: 26). The philosophy of Ubuntu thus stands in contrast to the 'Western' philosophical tradition of regarding the human being as a unique individual who comes to his or her own and individual identity solely through rationality and ego-consciousness. In the context of Ubuntu, the relationship to other human beings is central and it is assumed that an individual human being can only become and exist through other human beings, i.e. through community (Zamponi 2007). Ubuntu is based on the assumption that "a person is a person because of other persons" (Murove 2014: 37; cf. Ngomane 2019), i.e. that the identities of individuals can only be formed in the context of community, thus following a fundamentally different philosophical approach to becoming human. Thus, one is not sub-human, by nature. But one can act in an inhuman way based on conduct, in particular in relationship to others, especially those others who require help and support. In the philosophy of Ubuntu, the view of the world is guided "by the idea of equality" and by a "feeling of gratitude" (Ngomane 2019: 25). This implies walking through the world mindfully and paying attention to your thoughts and the resulting actions. Mindfulness means "being aware of your judgements and the feelings associated with them. Then say goodbye to them in silence." (ibid. 2019: 31). This is important because any devaluation of another person is also tantamount to devaluing yourself. If I harm another person, I harm myself. It follows that the assumption that a person can only be human through other humans does not only entail the need for a relationship or connection with other people. It also requires the ability to empathise with other people, i.e. the gift of putting oneself in the other person's shoes and engaging with their feelings and thoughts: "Ubuntu asks us not to judge, but to allow compassion and mutual understanding to prevail. It invites us to turn down the volume of our (often self-righteous) inner voice and ask questions on behalf of our counterpart." (ibid. 2019: 51).

This approach was devalued in the colonial logic and hierarchisation of 'knowledge' by European philosophers, since "the idea that communal ethic and communal existence was nothing else but an expression of primitivism which ought to be conquered by an ethic of individualism which has been the main reason behind the rise of western civilization" (Murove 2014: 8). As a result, many traditions of thought, social practices and languages of formerly colonised regions have been devalued as 'primitive' through the dominant Eurocentric lens and have been forgotten or erased (Diop 1955). Rediscovering these, and applying them further, is a decolonial approach to Eurocentric bodies of knowledge (de Sousa 2018). An undertaking that, like any other decolonisation process, is also marked

by setbacks in view of the effectiveness of Eurocentric bodies of knowledge, European ways of thinking and supposedly superiority.

What does practising the philosophy of Ubuntu mean? On the philosophical basis described above, practising Ubuntu means that the virtue of solidarity and acting in the interest of others increases the valorisation of a person's personhood. Ubuntu therefore sees people as interconnected and solidarity here is not an option: it is integral to being human. Any world outlook and action that injures the dignity of another person harms the social whole. To be self-centred and egotistical is not compatible with the expectations of a decent person. What is important here is that solidarity is not something that comes at a later stage; it is constitutive, expected, and definitive of being human. One is expected to view their humanity through others (cf. Ngomane). How they think of, relate to and support others. Instead of seeing others as inferior, or tools to be used. Others become an extension of oneself. This means that the focus is on the community rather than on the individual, but this does not mean denying the value of the individual. On the contrary: "Every individual counts, everyone makes their contribution, and when everyone works together, great things become possible" (ibid. 2019: 36).

2.2 Ubuntu in the context of white supremacy: or how to learn being equal?

The import of the above is the conceptual universe that Ubuntu opens up in thinking about the human condition, the inequality inherent in it, and for our purposes, the dehumanisation that colonialism has occasioned and how to overcome it by recognising the dignity of all. Among other things, centralising Ubuntu in unlearning white supremacy does two things:

1. It provides the world with an open humanist philosophy that is a corrective to a limited humanism that defines others from the outset as sub-human, inferior, in need of instruction, leadership and civilisation. This results in compassion for all people (living beings), which would have to be learnt anew in the context of white supremacy. White people would have to work on their ability to develop compassion for non-white people, as the centuries-old narrative of white supremacy, as described above, runs deep.
2. By deploying a philosophy that is from the marginalised sections of humanity, it serves the function of contributing to chipping away at the entrenched Eurocentrism and narrow intellectual universe which purports to speak to the whole of humanity while ignoring intellectual productions and worldviews that emerge out of non-Western sites of thinking.

For such a philosophy, whatever undermines human flourishing has to be unlearned. What therefore is the place of Ubuntu in a world deeply marked by white supremacy and inequality? Ubuntu teaches us to view supremacy as inimical to the perpetrator and its

victim. The perpetrator of white supremacy has a responsibility to learn to see others as equal and therefore deserving of dignity and respect. It calls for the perpetrator to restore her/his humanity by a commitment to anti-supremacy and the acceptance of the inherent equality of all lives.

In this context, solidarity functions as a way of taking responsibility for other people and their wellbeing (Boni 2014). It means standing with others in their struggles and extending support and care. Not in a matronising and patronising way, but by working to undo our individual and structural impediments that have been structurally put in the path of others by systems of oppression (Moreira 2010). For our purposes, identifying the perpetrators and beneficiaries of white supremacy and working against the institutional arrangements and interpersonal factors that reduce non-white people to things to be used; burdens to be exorcised. It is as Baldwin wrote “a problem of whether or not you’re willing to look at your life and be responsible for it, and then begin to change it.” (2017: 50)

The imperative for white people to take responsibility should be seen against the background of colonial history and its contemporary implications. Colonialism has elevated whiteness and devalued non-white lives. That history shapes socio-economic opportunities and life chances. A vision of a world that values the inherent equality of all can only be realized by understanding and deconstructing what white supremacy means for both white people and non-white people. It calls for a serious understanding of black consciousness as a liberatory project, instead of the erroneous view that it constitutes another form of supremacy. For black consciousness proceeds from the rejection of ‘race’ as an essential part of being human. It rather sees racism as a relationship of power and therefore an experience which shapes people’s lives (Mamdani 2001; Mantena 2010). For supremacy to be eliminated, the oppressed take pride in who they are. That is the essence of white supremacy.

Accordingly, white people who aim to work towards a human world may want to begin by asking themselves what it means to be non-white in a world made in the image of whiteness. This calls for considering whiteness as a privilege and developing compassion with non-white lives. Without that, it is hard to proceed, because questioning is an important first step. This is because we “cannot dismantle what we cannot see. You cannot challenge what you do not understand.” (Saad 2020: 38) Not wanting to see is already part of the privilege, as is not reacting.

Since white supremacy is a sociological reality, it follows that it can be unlearned through careful consideration of what it does to a person, groups and societies and humanity at large. Learning as an act of openness to new ideas and new aptitudes are possible (Usman 2006). In the context of white supremacy, it relates to seeing the human in every person and a willingness to right the wrongs of the past and the way white supremacy is manifested in the present. It is not about fetishizing non-white people as special or always right, but seeing them as human with the same range of emotions, capacities and frailties as all humans. It is about human equality, not difference.

In a situation where white supremacy has led to deep loss of trust between white people and non-white people, solidarity would mean both racialized groups finding ways to build trust, as a task demanding solidarity. It is important to view this process

as part of the bigger whole, not just individual-level solutions, although the individual is a part of the whole. It is about changing structures of oppression together. It is about seeing the place of class, gender, and other markers of dehumanization that make people racialized in many ways; this includes whites whose experience in this respect depends on their socio-economic standing. It is about changing the world, from its capitalist underpinnings to its racist hierarchies, gendered oppressions, and other intolerances.

Finally, this calls for seeing human beings as human beings *sans* hierarchisation of humanity. As Fanon (cf. 2001) said, it means eliminating both the White and the Black as euphemisms of power and oppression, respectively.

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Anmerkungen

- 1 At this point it should be noted that “Eastern Europe does not (does not yet? never did?) belong properly to ‘the West’” (Hall 1992: 185), the ‘Europe’ that describes itself as ‘modern’, ‘civilised’ and ‘developed’.

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