

Miriam Aced

Speaking about that, which has been made non-existent: racism

I've been active in several political groups in order to give the topic of racism a stage in Germany. This in itself has been a big battle. How do you counter something when the mainstream thinks it doesn't exist?

Racism is not acknowledged broadly in Germany as being an issue that is institutionally anchored into most parts of social and political life. If it is acknowledged at all, it is done so only in relation to colonialism, Nazi Germany or the transatlantic slave trade. That these events have a continuity that has followed us up until now is not given any attention. It is dogmatically countered (in my opinion) with a result that colonial power relations are cemented and all those not fitting into the German 'norm' (I am using this term critically) are either othered (i.e. they are considered guests, who should be happy to have the opportunity to live here) or they are forced to assimilate.

On the very important question of statistics: Racial or ethnic disaggregated statistics do not exist in Germany. (When I use the term 'race', I am using it in an anglo-saxon way, i.e. 'race' is socially constructed, but nevertheless has very real affects on those who are racialized.) This is partly due to Germany's past in which these statistics were used to commit genocide against certain racialized communities. This is one of the reasons why the conversation around racism is so difficult in Germany. People say that it is not an issue. I would even go as far as to say that Germany has created a new sense of German nationalist pride in its celebration of the work that has been done in order to overcome its past. I personally think this 'work' that has been done was lacking. We can see clear continuities between Germany's past and what is happening today. We can see that German colonialism has been largely ignored and voices of those voices which have come out to speak up about this issue have been silenced. If we could show that racialized communities are not represented e.g. in certain positions or that they are overrepresented in criminal statistics, then we could begin having a conversation about racism.

When migrant communities, Brown and Black communities (who have all been a part of Germany's history for a long time, not just since Germany began recruiting guest workers to re-build its country and not just since the arrival of refugees in 2015) speak out about and against racism, their experiences are not deemed legitimate. (And this is also and especially the case in academia, which reproduces white supremacist knowledge and deems Black voices and voices of color as not legitimate/academic.) Having racism-related data would help in this case.

People often counter the call for ethnic or racial statistics and deem them illegal or even racist. However, this would be following the same logic as colorblindness ("I don't see race, I don't see color."). Not acknowledging that we live in a society, which is diverse and in which people from marginalized backgrounds are discriminated against and have less (if not no) access to societal goods like housing, education, etc. is racist. And it's not like Germany is not aware of this. Germany ratified the International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination. The independent body responsible for monitoring whether States party to this treaty are following its obligations criticized Germany in 2015 for not having instated mechanisms for collecting statistics on groups affected by racism. The body also mentioned that the 'Migrationshintergrund' is simply not enough.

I also think that it's important to acknowledge that this country finds itself in a pre-racial state (a pre-racial state being the total non-understanding and acknowledgment of structural racism; racial state being the acknowledgment that groups enjoy varying degrees of privileges and rights, also due to their 'race' and this is racist; post-racial state being the overcoming of racist structures or the redistribution of privileges, which I don't think exists anywhere - if it does, please correct me if I'm wrong!)

The author is a member of NaRI! (Nein zu antimuslimischen Rassismus und Islamfeindlichkeit)

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