Afterword: "Nothing Can Be Changed until It Is Faced"

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> You never had to look at me.
> I had to look at you.
> I know more about you than you know about me.
> Not everything that is faced can be changed;
> but nothing can be changed until it is faced.
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> (Baldwin 103)

This twentieth anniversary *COPAS* special issue considers how white supremacy operates in cultural practices and political stances in US American contexts. James Baldwin's words in the epigraph above point out the necessity of looking at a phenomenon that is at once familiar and yet has taken on new shades of violence and virulence today—while fantasies of post-raciality and white innocence still abound.

I write this afterword with mixed feelings; feelings which help me situate myself and my intellectual contribution here in a space that allows me to find words to face the fact that 'nothing can be changed until it is faced.' And what is it that must be faced? What must be changed? The short answers are: white supremacy needs to be faced as it comes to a head in contemporary life. And those who benefit from the contexts of privilege which enable white supremacy need to revisit their perspectives on whiteness to recognize that its manifestation as white supremacy has done—and is still doing—more harm than good both to white people as well as people of color. Why would something as political and emotional as this find space in an academic context? A change in thinking about how academic work contains both political and affective investments then bears scrutiny. Against this canvas, I find myself in a significant liminal space, both as an experiencing intersectional subject and as a research scholar training a critical intersectional lens on white supremacy in the United States, while ruminating on how such knowledge has meaning for German society today.

This is not an easy space to occupy as numerous scholars of color know, working with multiple trajectories and perspectives, when engaging with racism, sexism, classism, homo- and transphobia, ableism, and other modes of structural oppression that constitute the realities of worlds of color. Recognizing the political realities of people of color, when considering the operations of white supremacy in cultural interaction and production in US American contexts, is a necessary aspect of the work done in addressing forms of social injustice. I cast about for examples of scholarly work produced in this liminal space of political engagement, affective investment, and knowledge production, where anger,

concern, grief, hope, intersectional critique, and scholarly acumen come together to produce much-needed analyses of aesthetic, political, and epistemological productions.

I found such in *The Fire Now: Anti-Racist Scholarship in Times of Explicit Racial Violence* edited by Beth Kamunge, Remi Joseph-Salisbury, and Azeezat Johnson (2018). This seminal work sets out nuanced and reflexive scholarship on "racism's dynamism, its ever mutating forms" (2), based on observations of Trump's administration and BrExit politics. Produced in the context of wrapping up their work on the 'Critical Race and Ethnicities Network,' Kamunge et al. saw their roles as witnesses, which raised questions that contributed to the rationale of the volume itself: "What does it mean for us as academics/activists to witness? What is it that we are witnessing, for whom, and for what purpose?" (3). Hence, here I am as an academic witness, a German scholar of color (with 'Migrationshintergrund'), redirecting my own critical gaze on white supremacy in the US and in Germany, through my (virtual) conversations with the contributions in this *COPAS* special issue on the matter.

'Can I get a witness?': Redirecting a Critical German Gaze of Color on white Supremacy

As an educator of color active in English and American Literary and Cultural Studies here in Germany, I am interested in seeing how young German scholars view politics and power dynamics—both as part of the knowledge production processes and within the knowledge production activity itself, where an object of investigation is subject to rigorous analysis. Scholarship on difficult, painful, and complicated matters like race and gender politics acquire a more hopeful and politically informed cast when intersectional frames of critical inquiry and praxis are incorporated into research methodologies that allow for the reflexive identification of power relationalities. And the world is no less difficult and painful now than it was during James Baldwin's day, when he writes in *The Fire Next Time* (1963)—in a series of reflections on race politics in the US—directed to his nephew:

> The details and symbols of your life have been deliberately constructed to make you believe what white people say about you. Please try to remember that what they believe, as well as what they do and cause you to endure, does not testify to your inferiority but to their inhumanity and fear. (293)

Baldwin's letter to the younger James on the occasion of the Centennial Anniversary of Emancipation Proclamation contains this telling piece of advice with a view towards survival and witness for the next generations; indeed *The Fire Next Time* (1963) served as inspiration for the work done in *The Fire Now* (2018) by its editors and contributors. Baldwin's advice to his nephew—and by extension to his readers of color—is a succinct description of the effects of white supremacy on racialized people as part of the colonizing agenda, both in historical and current political contexts. This advice also points out the unavoidable engagement with the painful contortions of human fallibility that produce white supremacy and keep it in operation. It cites, mobilizes, and remembers the critical race perspectives on white identity

from past intellectuals of color, e.g., Anna Julia Cooper, Richard Wright, W. E. B. Du Bois, Frederick Douglass, Harriet Jacobs, Toni Morrison, Maya Angelou, June Jordan, Audre Lorde, and Angela Davis, among others. At the same time, Baldwin's advice is an urgent call to redirect the critical gaze at whiteness as an act of resistance towards hidden assumptions:

> […] that racial polarization comes from the existence of blacks rather than from the behavior of whites, that black people are a 'problem' for whites rather than fellow citizens entitled to justice, and that unless otherwise specified, 'Americans' means 'whites.' (Lipsitz 1)

Hence in upending and upsetting these hidden assumptions, we scholars (white and of color) invested in Critical Race and Critical Whiteness Studies, redirect our critical gazes with a view to considering the ways in which whiteness enjoys the privilege of interpretive sovereignty with regard to questions of citizenship, belonging, existence (including death!), and knowledge production. This is a necessary, if uncomfortable, step to developing new ways of looking at the world in its current political state. Who might this be (un)comfortable for? Why might such a critical gaze be important now? Aligned with Audre Lorde's tenet that our silence will not help us (40-44), I maintain along with Baldwin that "nothing can be changed unless it is faced" and there is much that needs facing and changing, despite the discomfort that change brings with it.

As early career scholars themselves, the editors of this special issue recognize the urgency of addressing contemporary manifestations of white supremacy in the US American national narrative embedded in histories of genocidal conquest and chattel slavery. These forms of violent colonial subjugation were based on (and further developed) race-based thinking at the root of white dominance, which ties in with Audre Lorde's succinct definition of racism as "[t]he belief in the inherent superiority of one race over all others and thereby the right to dominance" (115, 114-23). The editors emphasize how whiteness itself is racialized through white-walling and white-washing as mechanisms of differentiating American citizenship along racial lines designed to exclude Indigenous, Black, Asian, and Latin Americans from the national narrative of belonging:

> We understand 'white supremacy' as an often-unacknowledged origin story of the United States of America that renders intelligible and legitimate its socio-political order. It is a story that is daily rehearsed on the symbolic and structural level […] in order to maintain hegemony. This story is always shaped and undergirded by intersecting forces such as hetero-patriarchy, classism, and ableism. (Essi et al. 6)

The historicized intersectional sites of violence and exclusion entrenched in power relations operating around specific identity vectors (i.e., race, gender, class, disability—and here I would add education, literacy, and living spaces, among others) are definitely salient aspects of this intervention in studies of current white supremacist logics and discourses shaping supposedly 'new' modes of crisis (Crenshaw; Lewis; Hill Collins and Bilge). The editors rightly articulate their indignation at the notion of Donald Trump's America as a 'new' phenomenon and they point out the continuities of Trump's brand of white supremacy as a "backlash […] against social and legal progress of non-white, queer, and disabled minorities" (7). The

current media focus on Trump's person threatens to obscure the historicity of symbolic and structural vocabularies reinforcing white, middle class, ableist, cis-heteropatriarchal, masculinist privilege as the hegemonic default position. Such reinforcement feeds off narratives of so-called 'race-neutral' meritocracy and ostensible white victimization and endangerment (ibid.), underscoring an improbable post-racial narrative depicting white wishful thinking that Du Bois's problem of the color-line has been gotten over once and for all.

Aside from more transnational images of enraged bald-headed men in combat boots and leather jackets doing the Hitler salute and shouting racist Nazi slogans and slurs, the idea of white supremacy in the US conjures up visions of white men dressed in white robes and pointed hoods setting fire to crosses in front yards, the birther movement, segments of the Tea Party movement, and even the Republican party. Indeed, the media has done much to foster the impression that white supremacy is a masculinist arena of activity and identification. Robin DiAngelo's 2018 *White Fragility* also cites more graphic images of "self-described 'alt-right' white nationalists marching with torches in Virginia and shouting 'blood and soil' as they protest the removal of Confederate war memorials" (28). And yet, white supremacy can be found in seemingly 'respectable,' middle class, white contexts, without a single combat boot, burning cross, or white hood in sight. There is, however, a general inability to understand white supremacy as entrenched in historicized white-centered worldviews rooted in colonial logics that in turn are embedded in pre-colonial and pre-modern insular ideologies (e.g., highly evaluative racializing binaries in European medieval cultural productions), which do not encompass—indeed actively exclude—non-white perspectives in cultural imaginaries. DiAngelo observes:

> […] white supremacy is a descriptive and useful term to capture the all-encompassing centrality and assumed superiority of people defined and perceived as white and the practices based on this assumption. White supremacy in this context does not refer to individual white people and their individual intentions or actions but to an overarching political, economic, and social system of domination. […] [R]acism is a structure, not an event. While hate groups that openly proclaim white superiority do exist and this term refers to them also, the popular consciousness solely associates white supremacy with these radical groups. This reductive definition obscures the reality of the larger system at work and prevents us from addressing this system.
> While racism in other cultures exists based on different ideas of which racial group is superior to another, the United States is a global power, and through movies and media, corporate culture, advertising, US-owned manufacturing, military presence, historical colonial relations, missionary work, and other means, white supremacy is circulated globally. This powerful ideology promotes the idea of whiteness as the ideal for humanity well beyond the West. White supremacy is especially relevant in countries that have a history of colonialism by Western nations. (28-29)

Thus white supremacy has to be studied in conjunction with colonial historical narratives in transnational relational webs, rather than attempting to locate it in singular geophysical spaces like the US and specific geopolitical moments for which Trump's America currently

serves as a ready example. A valuable asset in such nuanced engagement with white supremacy is noting how structural similarities have arisen in different sociopolitical contexts with colonial histories, wherein whiteness bears the unmarked privilege of heteronormative hegemony. At the same time, analyzing whiteness in the framework of white supremacy also entails considering how identity vectors like gender, class, sexual orientation, religion, able-bodiedness, and education play out in the intersectional webs of the politics of locations, the particularities of time and place, the ways people live within and through their material worlds (Hill Collins; Hill Collins and Bilge).

Hence, in this light, my understandings of white supremacy engage with two overarching frames which I will attempt to bring to bear on my readings of the contributions for this special issue:[1]

- Positionalities of hegemonic, subjugated, and complicit groups aligned with specific contexts of social (in)justice involved in white supremacist contexts studied need to be recognized with regard to power differentials. Contingently, the self-positioning of white scholars as well as scholars of color engaged in knowledge production processes would be a mode of self-reflexivity necessary for mapping white supremacy in cultural productions through analytical translations and interpretations of coded hegemonic practices. Such analytical translation calls for unpacking the intersections and co-constitutions of systems of oppression and how these are reproduced, reframed, and resisted.

- Intersectional framings of hierarchies of diversity and institutional oppressions through specific social contexts should address histories and relationalities, as well as material arrangements of bodies and spaces. In addition, affective attachments and emotions need to be considered regarding political investments in group collectivities and consciousness entrenched in forms of racial (classed and gendered) belonging.

Reflecting on White Supremacy in US American Cultural Productions

Of the five contributions, three (produced by white European scholars) focus on how white supremacy is represented in US American cultural productions, among them, film, novels, and music.

Till Kadritzke's "Charles Reich, *Easy Rider*, and the Politics of Countercultural Whiteness" analyses the 1969 New Hollywood film *Easy Rider* by Dennis Hopper refracted through a reading of Charles Reich's 1970 work *The Greening of America*. Here, Kadritzke is keen to locate the trope of the 'loss of the self' in a history of white subjecthood that currently still shapes US American sociopolitical and cultural landscapes, where he examines how the film

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[1]   These aspects have been culled from my readings of Melissa Steyn's work (Steyn, "Critical Diversity Literacy").

can be read to unearth New Hollywood's aesthetic strategies to bestow cultural authority on countercultural whiteness (80). Kadritzke reads three modes of white masculinity in the film as 'deviating' (hippie, alcoholic) from the normative models of white middle class masculinity in the 1960s: "*Easy Rider* thus uses the confrontation between 'rednecks' and 'hippies' to sketch the former as racist, sexist, and homophobic bigots while the dehumanization of the hippies rests on an emasculation […] constructing a community of outsiders across color lines" (82). The film is able to do this, according to the author, through "a common discursive strategy in the late 1960s when the racism experienced by African Americans in the United States became metonymically stretched to encompass the system's oppression against all those who imagined themselves in opposition to it" (82). Kadritzke's insightful reading could even be pushed further. I would point out that while white hippie masculinity is being coded as a form of emasculated blackness by white 'rednecks' in the film, the racialization of the 'rednecks' or 'white trash' by white middle class hegemonic groups through socio-economic, racial, and gender vectors merits some scrutiny that could complicate this relational web (Isenberg; Newitz and Wray).

Kadritzke's reading of *Easy Rider* demonstrates how countercultural whiteness has been necessary for the development of current neo-liberal frames, whereby, following George Lipsitz's and Toni Morrison's premises, Black culture and political struggle for citizenship are consumed and exploited to resolve identity crises within white Euro-American contexts. Could the aestheticization of countercultural whiteness then absolve it from its complicity with white supremacist agendas? This is implicit in Kadritzke's position that "countercultural whiteness might ultimately have turned from a subject position of concealed privilege to an openly racist one" given the current political climate (88). Considering that Kadritzke hopes to contribute to interrogations of actual race politics, subjectivity, and affect relationalities identified in radical, conservative, or progressive cultural stances with regard to white supremacy, it would have been interesting to see what kind of forms of countercultural whiteness can be identified in the German socio-cultural imaginary. Against the canvas of traditional perspectives of small businessmen, dominant mid-twentieth century "values of an organization society," and the mindset of "the new generation" (Reich qtd. in Kadritzke 75), Kadritzke's interrogation has the potential to investigate German socio-political frames as possibly either having influenced or having been influenced by Reich's three framings of the American 'crisis of self.' Tracing these three framings in the trajectory of German whiteness during the 1950s and 1960s in comparison with US American contexts could flesh out the conversation from a German American Studies perspective, especially with regard to the political relations between Germany and the US, given the significantly visible post-World War II American military presence in Germany (Höhn and Klimke; Höhn).

In "Spectres of Whiteness in Don DeLillo's *Zero K*," Mariya Dimitrova Nikolova aims to challenge the positive reviews of DeLillo's novel by underscoring the haunting absence of Black characters and sensibilities generally to be found in his oeuvre as one of the techniques through which the novel foregrounds a 'respectable' mode of white supremacy.

The author identifies the problematic equation of Blackness with death and dead objects, thus pointing out how DeLillo has displaced and defused an abstracted Blackness in its absent presence, as a threat against whiteness. In this, Nikolova critiques an essentialised mode of 'Black being' as incommensurate with (unspecified) ideals of American citizenship; this critique would have benefitted from a definition of the tropes denoting 'Black being'— perhaps as problematized in the theoretical trajectory of Afropessimism (Wilderson 14-17). Such objectification and abjectification of Blackness and its erasure from American history is contingent with the narrative of whiteness being privileged through its unmarkedness. While Nikolova critically unpacks the novel's allusions to "post-racial and post-postcolonial future" (99) America and a widely shared understanding of DeLillo's work amongst critics as invested in historical consciousness, her observations could be further developed by acknowledging historically conscious modes in Indigenous, Black, and Latinx writing, which take more critical stances on visions of US American post-raciality.

In her discussion of how objectification and death are used in the novel to denote images of failed womanhood, the author points out DeLillo's troping of Black being as 'unhuman/deadly' in his depiction of racialized femininity. This 'unhumanness' is projected on mannequin bodies as "'painted in dark washes' and 'rust-colored,' […] described as wearing chadors or burqas, standing 'in the heat and dust,'" leading Nikolova to conclude that "the mannequins carry characteristics of Muslim women in a desert-like environment" (105). Unfortunately, intersectional specificities of Muslim women's contexts are left unaddressed when the author moves on to reframe the 'dead,' non-living mannequin bodies in the context of enslaved women's experiences a few pages later, using Saidiya Hartman's terms of bodily availability and accumulation (106). Nikolova's contribution is insightful in this reframing of fragmented Black femininity, but seems to conflate two different racialised feminine contexts in her readings of 'Black being.'

In "Singing for a White 'City upon a Hill,'" Axelle Germanaz cites influences on contemporary white supremacy that mobilize readings of theories and histories of white supremacist thought rooted in white Northern European medieval[2] cultural traditions as well as

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[2] As Jennifer Schuessler points out in her *New York Times* article "Medieval Scholars Joust with White Nationalists": "In Europe, academic study of the Middle Ages developed in tandem with a romantic nationalism that rooted the nation-state in an idealized past populated by Anglo-Saxons and other supposedly distinct 'races.' In the United States, universities, cultural institutions and wealthy elites drew on Gothic architecture, heraldry and other medieval trappings to ground American identity in a noble (and implicitly white) European history. So did Southern slaveholders and the Ku Klux Klan [...] During the 2016 election, memes like Donald Trump in armor on a horse and the Crusader slogan 'Deus vult' ('God wills it' began proliferating on social media. White nationalists stepped up recruiting on college campuses, sometimes co-opting the language of identity politics with calls for students to explore their 'white heritage.' Then came Charlottesville, where the sight of marchers carrying shields evoking the Knights Templar or holding banners with Anglo-Saxon runes came as a shock to many scholars."

See also recent debates among American scholars of European medieval studies concerning white supremacist thinking amongst established scholars, which has led to exclusionary treatment of and protests by American medieval scholars of colour (Kim; Changani).

influential elements from German Nazi ideologies. Germanaz's reading of 'white power music' generates a lens to consider iconic models of white heroism expected to perpetrate violence on racialized people "for the supposed betterment or regeneration of the 'white race'" (50). The author implements this framing to further reflect on recent white power terrorist activity. Germanaz points out models of militarized masculinity as one aspect of the heteropatriarchal framing of a propagated "'natural' order" (49) and could further zoom in on modes of white femininity as necessary for the reinforcement of this mythical scaffolding of white supremacy.

Germanaz reveals colonial discourses of conquest and domination in US American white power music that reproduce the mythic rhetoric of 'manifest destiny' replete with ideas of purification, cleansing, and regeneration. She further demonstrates how white power music rests on mythic discourse; such a reading should be extended to be vigilant of the virulent power of such myths in political indoctrination that occurs during white power music events—currently instantiated in Germany, e.g., 'RechtsRockfestivals' in Thuringia like 'Combat 18 Deutschland' or 'Schwert und Schild Sommerfestival' organized by the Neo-Nazi organizations Arische Bruderschaft and the Turonen.[3]

Theoretical Considerations on 'A Different Way of Relating to Whiteness'

Cord-Heinrich Plinke's "Identity, Affect, Alliance: Thinking Whiteness Transnationally" compares and contrasts "socially constructed categories of race and ethnicity between Western Europe and the United States" (19) to elucidate transnational understandings of whiteness. Based on insights culled from Robyn Wiegman's and Geoff Eley's readings of whiteness as invisibility and as haunting lack, Plinke posits the unbelongingness of people of color in both US American and in Western European understandings of citizenship. To this end, he recommends the life story of Malcolm X as a key text to study white supremacy in the US American context. For the German context, his larger research project could be greatly enriched by turning to the life stories of racialized Germans like Hans-Jürgen Massaquoi, Ika Hügel-Marshall, or the collective of Black German women scholars, artists, and activists, whose work was published as *Showing our Colors* (1992; first published in German in 1986 as *Farbe Bekennen*). All of these narratives consider transnational PoC citizenship as a central trope, where Americanness and Germanness are held up to scrutiny.

Plinke foregrounds the justified critique articulated by Wiegman that Critical Whiteness Studies runs the risk of prioritizing white scholars' feelings of guilt, fragility, and need for 'feel good' affirmation. However, in Plinke's account Critical Whiteness Studies is read as a

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[3]   Thorsten Hindrichs' forthcoming work *Schwarz Rot Pop* represents the most recent study on music in Germany's right-wing populist scenes and Jan Raabe's *White Noise: Rechts-Rock, Skinhead-Musik, Blood & Honour* considers German right-wing extremist and Neo-Nazi music scenes and their transnational connections. Other recent discussions of the phenomenon can be found in the documentary *Rechtsrock in Deutschland: Das Netzwerk der Neo-Nazis* (available online at *ZDF Mediathek*).

field of white scholarship that is clearly delimited from Critical Race Theory. While white scholars like Ruth Frankenberg, Tim Wise, Richard Dyer, David Goldberg, Alison Bailey, and Robin DiAngelo, among others, have indeed contributed significantly to the field of Critical Whiteness Studies, it is always imperative to recognize that scholars and intellectuals of color active in Critical Race Studies have historically addressed whiteness as an intrinsic aspect of that discipline in order to develop critical perspectives to question hegemonic white racialized epistemologies, among them white supremacy. And, indeed, Plinke mobilizes the more contemporary works of Sara Ahmed, Édouard Glissant, Rita Chin, Denise Da Silva, Anne Cheng, José Esteban Muñoz, and Anoop Nayak to develop his methodology to read whiteness transnationally. To this, he adds Judith Butler's reading of queerness as 'alliance' rather than identity, to contemplate reading race along similar lines, in terms of alliance as affective attachments to those who are oppressed, marginalised, or excluded. Plinke thus advocates a "different way of relating to the category of whiteness itself," since "investment in identity categories is always highly affective" (31). His suggestion to first interrogate sexual and gender identity categories through a queer lens and then subsequently mobilize the lessons learned "to think about instances of racialization and the fight against white supremacy'" (31), however, bears reframing with regard to privilege, democracy, and rights. Here, a different method of relating to whiteness then requires recognizing the relationality of whiteness to other racialized positions using an intersectional lens.

A Couple of American Studies Perspectives on German Academia, German Society, and Who Belongs

The affective and political implications salient to framings of democracy and citizenship for people of color require considering intersections of race, class, gender, sexuality, religion, socio-economic background, caste, and several other identity vectors:

> Intersectionality is a lens through which you can see where power comes and collides, where it interlocks and intersects. It's not simply that there's a race problem here, a gender problem here, and a class or LGBTQ problem there. Many times that framework erases what happens to people who are subject to all of these things. (Crenshaw qtd. in Columbia Law School)

This crucial aspect of power addressed above is rendered most transparent in Rahab Njeri's and Nele Sawallisch's joint contribution "(German) Academia and White Supremacy," which draws connections between US frames of reference and German cultural contexts. As German scholars of American Studies, the authors consider their particular positionalities and modes of relationality to their field of research, the academic activity around it, and the people involved in German higher education contexts. Njeri addresses the complexities of race, gender, and class in German academic contexts to highlight the operations of white supremacy in current German cultural imaginaries as being incapable of conceiving of German citizenship as anything other than white. Thus, interestingly, the whitening of

German citizenship is possible through the invisibilization of Germans of color. This invisibilization, oddly enough, simultaneously renders Germans of color hypervisible in their unbelonging (Opitz et al. 153-61; El-Tayeb 13-14, 60-69). In the university hiring context, "they tend to make up a very small percentage of the full time tenured faculty" (61) while many are hired on limited contracts—often to enable universities to fulfill their diversity quota for 'international' scholars. This is part of the power dynamic at work that renders unimaginable the idea that German scholars of color could possibly be faculty—at best they could be 'long-term students.' The current language around race in German academic (and non-academic) contexts (invested in 'respecting' white sensitivities about the Nazi past) does not allow for more pro-active democratic measures against this specific form of structural inequality. When addressing structural inequalities in contemporary contexts, German universities devote more attention to gender balances and equal opportunity with regard to disability, family needs as well as class locations; 'uncomfortable' categories like race (and often, religion) are often lumped together under the umbrella concept of 'diversity,' and are often dealt with cursorily. University spaces are permeated with power dynamics informing knowledge production processes, generating perspectives and relationalities that are marked by difference, and how difference is perceived and negotiated by those in hegemonic positions and those from marginalized spaces.

Articulating such observations notably often elicits indignation among hegemonic white groups which do not see themselves in the context of white supremacy; the white fragility at the root of such indignation is an important constituent of privilege (DiAngelo 99-106; Ahmed 147). Notably this is not limited to white administration or faculty; students, too, participate in upholding white privilege by subjecting educators of color to racist behaviors. Njeri's experiences of such serve to underscore the idea that German educators of color cannot expect to pursue their research and teaching in spaces free of racism—which in itself is a basic citizenship right. Despite such experiences, German scholars of color grimly soldier on, in order to attain goals that they were never meant to aspire to. The readiness with which scholars like Njeri make themselves approachable and hence 'knowable' in their 'strangeness' and 'novelty' for white scholars and students is often taken for granted, while white knowledge is posited as 'general knowledge' with canonical status. In her mode of 'witness' on structural inequality in German academia, Sawallisch recognizes the intellectual, social, and emotional labor that scholars of color are often called on to perform while they move on the peripheries. Such recognition, laudable as it is, has yet to become widespread and implemented in more active moves towards structural equality. There is hope as more recent publications—like this special issue, the 2019 volume *Who can Speak and Who is Heard/Hurt?* by Arghavan, Motyl, and Hirschfelder or Emily Ngubia's 2018 book *Stille Macht: Silence und Dekolonisierung*—address structural inequalities in transnational dialogues on white privilege and discrimination in university contexts.

The current normative perspective embraced by most white German scholars remains invested in the notion of 'objective,' 'distanced' scholarship that is evaluated as 'high-

quality' scholarship in accordance with white reference frames because it maintains that the university is an 'apolitical' space of 'neutral' knowledge production. Njeri, however, has pointed out what most German scholars of color have experienced: the university is a racialized, gendered, and classed space, where white supremacy still often operates to perpetuate and reinforce white normativity, privilege, innocence, and advantage within white understandings of democracy—frames which exclude positions of color. While 'objective distance' is greatly favored in German higher education contexts, I take the liberty of observing that knowledge production takes place in politicised and affective contexts from which the German university cannot divorce itself. The experiences narrated by Njeri and Sawallisch as Black German and white German women scholars in American Studies also underscore the value of intersectionality as a dual analytical tool addressing critical inquiry and praxis, comprising frames of knowledge production processes as well as the political consciousness of power differentials.[4] Within the university context, both scholars raise the necessity of reading the complex lives of racialized groups using intersectional frames, as these are subject to the kinds of power wielded in hegemonic understandings of whiteness.

Critical Encounters with Whiteness: An Intersectional Perspective on Knowledge Production

As observed in the aforementioned, critically encountering whiteness has bearing on the fact of cultural heterogeneity in German society; a fact that as yet has not been rendered legible and coherent in the German cultural imaginary—both within and outside the German university landscape. Alison Bailey's framing of intersectional thought as dismantling homogeneous readings of categories of difference can contribute to rehabilitating positions dehumanized by white supremacy:

> Thinking intersectionally has the advantage of rendering homogeneous categories and subjects politically suspect by situating individuals within networks of relations that complicate their social locations. It offers powerful, often historically based accounts of ways race, class, gender, sexuality, and many other categories come into existence in and through their relationships to one another in contradictory and complicated ways. Intersectionality clears space for marginalized groups to articulate new realities from complex locations. (54)

Thus looking at white supremacy entails considering the many trajectories and manifestations it can take while recognizing its effects on groups which bear the brunt of discriminatory practices that occur along multiple identity vectors. Having said that, I want to note that reproaches have been leveled at scholars of color that intersectional scholarship

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[4] Patricia Hill Collins and Sirma Bilge observe: "Using intersectionality as an analytic tool encourages us to move beyond seeing social inequality through race-only or class-only lenses. Instead intersectionality encourages understandings of social inequality based on interactions among various categories. […] Using intersectionality as an analytic tool means contextualizing one's arguments, primarily by being aware that particular historical, intellectual, and political contexts shape what we think and do" (26-28).

is based on identity politics, which does not make for 'proper,' 'disinterested,' 'neutral,' 'high-quality' scholarship—because it is too 'activist.' In this light, I quote Legal Studies scholar Kimberlé Crenshaw at some length:

> Conservatives have painted those who practice intersectionality as obsessed with "identity politics." […] [I]ntersectionality is not just about identities but about the institutions that use identity to exclude and privilege. The better we understand how identities and power work together from one context to another, the less likely our movements for change are to fracture. Others accuse intersectionality of being too theoretical, of being "all talk and no action." To that I say we've been "talking" about racial equality since the era of slavery and we're still not even close to realizing it. Instead of blaming the voices that highlight problems, we need to examine the structures of power that so successfully resist change. Some have argued that intersectional understanding creates an atmosphere of bullying and "privilege checking." Acknowledging privilege is hard—particularly for those who also experience discrimination and exclusion. While white women and men of color also experience discrimination, all too often their experiences are taken as the only point of departure for all conversations about discrimination. (Crenshaw qtd. in Gunda Werner Institute and the Center for Intersectional Justice 15)[5]

Crenshaw's observations thus underscore the necessity of directing critical gazes on the aspect of privilege for positions who claim the right to define what proper scholarship entails, where the reproach of 'privilege checking' is one that is frequently mobilized by whiteness in order to reinforce its own epistemic authority. I would re-direct my critical gaze then on such reproaches and enquire: Whose frames and epistemologies are being foregrounded as the yardsticks for 'proper,' 'quality' scholarship? Should educators and scholars of all shades and walks of life not work towards social justice? Indeed what is the purpose of education and research? And yet again, I choose to refract these questions from another angle: does white supremacy in its own intersectional cis-hetero-patriarchal (often masculinist) mainframe with regard to power claims and relations not mobilize identity politics which incorporates white anger, innocence, and fragility cloaked as 'unconscious bias'? Let us be clear: white supremacy stands in relation to the groups it intends to subjugate and intimidate; it uses power in ways that reinforce myths of superiority and reifies hierarchies that produce advantages for one group at the expense of the others.

In Lieu of a Conclusion: "A Terrifying Advantage"

The works in this issue merit recognition in their unabashed critiques of white supremacy in US American contexts; I applaud the efforts taken to engage with the intricacies of power dynamics which produce and reinforce racial hierarchies. And, indeed, the task is herculean;

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[5]   This text was first published in *The Washington Post* (Crenshaw, "Why Intersectionality Can't Wait"). See also the German translation, *"Reach Everyone on the Planet…"—Kimberlé Crenshaw und die Intersektionalität* by the Gunda-Werner Institute and the Center for Intersectional Justice.

tackling the topic of white supremacy as early career scholars in this special issue requires levels of stubbornness and perseverance capable of grasping and wrestling with the slippery strata of this elusive social phenomenon. The timeliness of this work is serendipitous, given the violence and virulence of white supremacy in its current manifestations, which are resuscitating and rehabilitating old ideologies that have served colonization, imperialism, and subjugation of most of the world (and the planet!) to the will of a (self-)chosen few.

Within these laudable attempts here, I also discovered much that needed to be (re)considered and recast in the purview of knowledge production processes, which I hope will continue the conversations begun in this special issue. Hence the Self-Other binary involving the researcher and the object of investigation needs to be kept in view and consistently refracted through a critical self-positioning that adds another level of reflexivity which enables generating thicker relationalities within the research constellation.

One scholar of color and one white scholar in the joint piece on structural racism in German academic contexts chose to position themselves, while another contributor framed his article around the question of how to (re)position oneself with regard to whiteness. But some of the other contributors did not engage with this exercise, demonstrating that whiteness is an unmarked default position still taken for granted in a German postgraduate academic context. Self-reflexive awareness is salient for white scholars engaged in knowledge production—among other things, about white supremacy and racialized contexts in the United States and elsewhere. Critical self-positioning throughout might have enhanced the political purchase of the research agendas undertaken for this special issue, for instance, by always looking out for the resonances, translations, and connections of white supremacy in German contexts.

It is notable that there are positions currently arguing against the efforts of (academic and activist) voices of color to uncover the strategies of obfuscation and denial embedded in structures meant to validate a singular mode of citizenship rooted in normative understandings of whiteness, while denying citizenship rights to those defined as Other. Recent political events in Germany are contiguous with the notable rise of white supremacy in the US and warrant more scrutiny. These would include the German AfD party's invitation to US American scholar Bruce Gilley in 2019 to give a talk in the Bundestag, based on his notorious 2017 essay "The Case for Colonialism," published in the journal *Third World Quarterly*. Gilley, a political science professor at Portland State University, spoke on putative benefits of colonialism for the former German colonies in the African countries of Tanzania, Togo, and Cameroon.[6] Bruce Gilley's investment in rehabilitating colonialism is a mode of

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6   See a report by the conservative *Deutschland Kurier* on Gilley's talk in the Bundestag, which also criticizes the *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung* for its critique of Gilley's 2017 publication: "Lecture by colonialism expert in the Bundestag: 'Why the Germans do not have to apologize for the colonial period.'" See also Thembi Wolf's "So plant die AfD neue Kolonien in Afrika: Der umstrittene Forscher Bruce Gilley hat die AfD-

reinforcing white supremacist ideology intended to help the AfD revive German nationalist sympathies.[7] This particular form of German-American relations would merit examination from a German American Studies perspective in reflecting on the overlaps between white supremacist ideologies among established politicians and educators in both countries.

Another instance involves the recent media attention focusing on a white nineteen-year-old German YouTube influencer Naomi Seibt, who styles herself a 'climate sceptic' or 'climate realist.' She is being touted in Germany's and US far-right scenes as the 'antidote' to the seventeen-year-old white Swedish climate activist Greta Thunberg. Reported to be a registered member of the AfD's youth wing, Seibt is on the payroll of a Chicago-based right wing think tank (The Heartland Institute),[8] which is currently preoccupied with challenging the general scientific consensus on climate change. Seibt has further been reported to have articulated support for Canadian alt-right internet activist Stefan Molyneux, who is known for propagating scientific racist, eugenicist, and white supremacist ideologies (Smith; see work by the Southern Poverty Law Center, which monitors white supremacy and extremist phenomena). Thus mapping the development of transnational forms of white supremacy amongst younger generations (often propagated on social media channels) in both geopolitical spaces would merit some attention.

At this point, let me state clearly that I am not invested in promoting the brands of white supremacy that the AfD, Gilley, and Seibt represent. My intention is to provoke considerations of white supremacy currently active in diverse permutations and combinations between US American and German contexts of knowledge production and political being. What marks these particular manifestations is their claim to scientific veracity and 'objectivity' in the interest of promulgating 'universalist,' 'humanist' values while denouncing anti-colonial, anti-racist, (as well as anti-feminist and anti-climate justice) agendas. Examining white supremacy in US American contexts warrants facing the same in Germany—that is, if our scholarship as Americanists in Germany is to have meaning in political frames, aside from aesthetic explorations. This aspect of our work involves the critical gaze re-directed on historical and contemporary whiteness, both from people of color as well as from white perspectives. This critical gaze coupled with the idea of witnessing ('Zeitzeug*innen'), brings me back to my epigraph, a fragment in Baldwin's *I am Not Your Negro*, a 2016 documentary film based on his writings:

> You cannot lynch me
> And keep me in the ghettos
> Without becoming something monstrous yourselves

Bundestagsfraktion beraten—und wir haben zugeguckt" in *Vice* as well as the following article from Wallstreet Online: "Bundestag: AfD verteidigt Vortrag über Vorzüge des deutschen Kolonialismus."

[7]   See Vijay Prashad's critique of *Third World Quarterly*'s decision to publish the controversial article despite doing badly in the review process and being recommended for rejection: "The essay appears in the age of Donald Trump, when white supremacy is back and the itch for colonialism is on the horizon" (Prashad).

[8]   See Naomi Seibt's profile: https://www.heartland.org/about-us/who-we-are/naomi-seibt.

> And furthermore you gave me a terrifying advantage.
> You never had to look at me.
> I had to look at you.
> I know more about you than you know about me.
> Not everything that is faced can be changed;
> but nothing can be changed until it is faced. (Baldwin 103)

Having to look at whiteness, when whiteness refuses to see perspectives of color and continues to insist on its 'democratic' right to devalue experiences of racism and racialization, and rendering them invisible (through violence, silencing, and segregation), requires a certain brand of courage. What are the knowledges to be culled from looking into the abyss of white supremacy? The work that scholars of color have to do in 'looking at you,' knowing that 'you never had to look at me' inspires mixed feelings—moved by a sense of justice, anger, grief as well as the necessity for change. At the same time white scholars looking at the white 'selfness' evoked in Baldwin's equation entails a refracted critical gaze that is no less political in its own need for change. Baldwin's realization that not everything that we move to confront can be changed may take the wind out of our sails and dampen our fervor. But this is tempered with the knowledge that until we do the work of facing white supremacy, there can be no hope of change. This advantage of looking and knowing then is terrifying—and that oddly enough can bring hope because the change that does come is hard-won and hence is all the more precious.

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