

## When We Feel: Racialized Emotions and Epistemic Violence in German Higher Education

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### Abstract

In this article I autoethnographically examine and reflect upon the connection between racialized emotions and epistemic violence in higher education. By having a closer look at one of the seminars I attended and my work in the General Student Committee, I analyse how every racialized emotion is consequential. Drawing on Ahmed's (2012), Bonilla-Silva's (2019), Lutz and Abu-Lughod's (1990) and other's notions of emotion and power I discuss my experiences and strengthen the understanding of emotion in race-related issues and knowledge-discourse.

**Keywords:** racialized emotions, epistemic violence, counter-storytelling, racism, emotions

### Introduction

As a German-Angolan<sup>1</sup> child growing up in Potsdam, Germany, there has been no phase in my life where I did not experience racism. As a child I did not understand, ignore, or sugar-coat many things; only later, mainly during my study years, I learned to process my experiences analytically and to make sense of many incidents. As I began my studies, I entertained the naïve thought that higher education would be more or less free of racism but to my dismay I experienced racist situations with fellow students and administrative staff, and, most of all, at problematic seminars.

Over the past few years, I have analyzed teacher-student relations and in-class interactions that were characterized by racism, drawing from similar experiences at several European universities. By closely examining how teachers introduce topics, deal with criticism, and treat different students, I have auto-ethnographically explained how universities actively perpetuate epistemic violence.

In my article *White Feelings and Black Knowledge: Tackling Racism and Epistemic Violence in German Higher Education* (Camufingo, 2018), I describe how my experiences of racism at an ostensibly critical and anti-discriminatory seminar, coupled with the experiences of my friends, resulted in the formation of a Black<sup>2</sup> university group. While my objections were vehemently dismissed and devalued as “emotional” during the seminar, paradoxically, white<sup>3</sup> people's feelings were centred under the guise of academic objectivity. This form of silencing was one of the things the university group intended to counter.

While I focused on the disavowal of the knowledge of marginalized people affected by racism and described how knowledge was formed, and whose knowledge mattered and why, I did not centre on the notion of emotion. However, by emphasizing the important role that subjective experiences and perceptions play in the formation of knowledge and truths, I countered the erroneous understanding that subjectivity was emotional and objectivity unemotional.

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<sup>1</sup> I self-identify as Black and Afro-German. However, that does not take away from acknowledging my privilege with respect to Colorism, based on being of mixed heritage and light-skinned and the contextual meaning of my self-determination. The experiences of Black people are not uniform.

<sup>2</sup> "Black" is a political self-determination of identitarian value and is therefore written in capital letters.

<sup>3</sup> “white“, on the other hand, historically has no identitarian value (aside from contemporary white supremacist beliefs) and is therefore written in lower case and sometimes in italics. It is used as a social construction to denote privilege.

A misconception that has been put to me primarily by white readers at times is that, in my writing, I was hoping that my knowledge would be accorded the status of the very objectivity I was actually criticizing, rather than acknowledging the strength of emotions as a valid basis for knowledge and theory. However, this confused perception simply emphasizes the lack of understanding. The inability to take marginalized knowledge seriously cannot be thought of in isolation from the perception that subjectivity and emotionality are weaknesses.

I was not trying to “dismantle the master’s house by using the master's tools” (Lorde, 2017/1977, 17). I tried to enable the readers to understand that the aforementioned discourse around knowledge is not simply one that people were or are being denied access to. It is one that is based on dehumanizing, marginalizing and “othering” people. With regard to emotions, it is a discourse that has perpetually disconnected what we feel from what we know. In this paper, I therefore, want to focus on racialized emotions and their connection to knowledge.

## **Another Course**

Before going into further detail, let us look at another course example. For one Winter term, I attended a course on the linguistic conditions of anglophone countries in West Africa, taught by a white professor. In one session we dealt with the history of the English language in such countries. When asking us students how we thought the English language was introduced to most West Africans, I immediately answered that it was imposed on them. My professor told me that I was wrong. In fact, the esteemed sociolinguist stated, it was not imposed because the British actually never wanted West Africans to learn the language. This was because they considered it prestigious. It was the African leaders who “wanted to stick with English and prioritize it over other indigenous languages.” We ended up having a discussion about the word “imposed,” about colonial continuities, racism, and Black or African agency—a discussion that had me explain that more than 160 years of British enslavement, more than 80 years of British colonialism in West Africa, and the Berlin Conference did not result in the self-confident, self-determined language acquisition of a colonial language by nations whose borders were created in this process, and leaders who were now negotiating complex interconnected economies and disordered and ruptured societies. The professor smiled condescendingly and started interrupting me, making sarcastic comments, and abrasively and incorrectly paraphrasing my words, such as, “So you think Nigerians today are still not developed enough to make a conscious decision about the language they speak?” The professor stopped listening and did not answer my questions, such as why it seemed to infuriate them so much that I did not agree. What could have been a fruitful discussion turned into the professor telling me how long they had been studying this subject and, as I was getting more emotional, pointing out my personal bias and that “we should stop here” because I am “probably boring the rest of the class,” which was watching silently. I should take some time to read the history, I was told. When I replied that their approach to these topics was simply racist and colonial, the professor returned, “I have my issues with people calling things ‘racist’ immediately. Was it really racist? You have to be very careful when saying these things, because it reinforces the idea that human beings can be classified into different races and there is only one race, the human race.”, clearly not understanding racism.

However, when a course on West African English is taught by a white German sociolinguist, studying parts of Africa without acknowledging the substantial effects of colonialism and white supremacy, it is epistemically racist. (see Grosfoguel, 2013). Ignoring colonial continuities and power structures that, to this day, affect countries that have been colonized in the past are not forms of conceding them agency in a contemporary world order. It simply reinforces the missing responsibility of former colonial powers (and white people) and their weighty interference with cultures and peoples all over the world. Following Fanon, it is impossible to hold the colonized to the standard of the colonizer when there is neither the same starting point, nor the same resources or privileges (see Fanon, 1963). At the same time, it is also a form of colonial continuity to presume to be able to choose when someone has agency and when not, when to grant a person humanity and when not, and to whom one chooses to give agency. To relinquish one’s own historical responsibility through a seemingly benevolent granting of individualistic rationale is a form of white innocence<sup>4</sup> that expresses itself in a variety of emotions when criticized.

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<sup>4</sup> The concept of white innocence I refer to is fully explained and analysed in Gloria Wekker’s publication *White Innocence: Paradoxes of Colonialism and Race* (2016).

While the described interaction goes beyond the scope of race because it reinforced other social categories and markers such as gender, age, degree, and position, it highlights multiple aspects of emotionality in academia.

1. The professor completely occupied the space by centering their own emotions, evident through their behaviour and reactions.
2. The professor reinforced the hierarchical notion of the knowing teacher versus the unknowing student.
3. The professor trivialized the process of language adoption in West Africa through a one-dimensional analysis.
4. The professor emotionalized my statements by implying that my own affectedness might influence my perception, instead of addressing the content of the points I raised.
5. The professor disregarded my emotions, felt attacked by them, and ended the discussion on the basis of their needs at the same time.
6. The professor precluded the possibility of the other students learning through this debate and the negotiation of histories and analysis under the guise of assuming the other students were “bored”.

After not wanting to be seen as racist, the situation ended ironically with this professor having successfully alienated me, a Black student, in a predominantly white classroom. Once again, I pondered what it would take for my objections to be taken seriously. Are my counterarguments irrelevant because I cannot substantiate the effects described by quoting from a history book written by a white author? After all, I cannot imagine that language and its development can seriously be considered detached from imperialism, colonialism, and related power structures—and yet this professor appeared to approach the question so.

What is crucial, apart from the epistemic question of whose knowledge is being taken seriously, however, is what I mentioned with regard to emotions. As I implicitly indicated before, we tend to look at knowledge and emotions separately. However, they are tightly interwoven. We can look at emotions from many different angles and analyse them in a wide range of disciplines, psychologically, neuro-scientifically, historically, sociologically, medically, linguistically, and the list goes on. What I want to focus on here are, as mentioned above, racialized emotions and their effects on knowledge production and perception in higher education.

Like Bonilla-Silva in *Feeling Race: Theorizing the Racial Economy of Emotions*, I am looking at racialized emotions in relation to what the writer calls “racialized societies” that are the products of social interactions (Bonilla-Silva, 2019, p.3). I am not analyzing emotions generally and, just like Bonilla-Silva, will not make a distinction between emotions and feelings in this paper. While it could be argued that feelings are pre-linguistic and emotions are the names of feelings, distinctions are also being made in regard to consciousness or mental versus physical reactions. Whichever way one tries to make a distinction between the two, they mostly do not function without one another and, after all, one feels (verb) an emotion (noun)<sup>5</sup>. What serves as a gateway for the analysis of my experiences is the way in which Bonilla-Silva points out the simultaneous construction and reality of race and emotions. By focusing on emotions as something that can be looked at from many angles and that racialized emotions are based on a social construct (race), we can overlook what is so palpable and yet so hard to articulate. However, Bonilla-Silva (2019) explains the significance of what I experienced here:

Whites’ emotions, like race itself, are socially real and have a materiality that cannot be ignored [...]. [T]heir emotions are real and consequential. (p.8)

If even fully separable, the consequences vary from individual to institutional and structural ones. The consequences also differ between white people and those facing racism. A possible consequence of racialized emotions is resistance. If we look back at the way racialized emotions sparked discussions on racism and epistemic violence by me trying to make the teacher and fellow students understand that they should stop using the n-word in the seminar that I described in 2018, we can see that every single emotional outcome materializes in a form of resistance (Camufingo, 2018). Here, I am not speaking about the resistance of white people to critically questioning themselves and their beliefs, but my own resistance in the form of founding a Black university group with my friends. The anger, frustration, and confusion that was caused by my experiences of feeling that I was not taken seriously motivated me to try to make a structural change. In fact, every racist experience I have had in a seminar resulted in a

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<sup>5</sup> However, it is important to note that we have to take neurodiversity, mental health and other cognitive conditions (if not categorized within that paradigm) into consideration when thinking about how different people process emotions and feelings.

form of protest in the name of social justice. Every emotion was consequential and material. What I experienced and felt in the course on West Africa described above was therefore also a catalyst for me to want to change something structurally. This time, however, not in the form of a university group. Instead, I applied to become a member of the Anti-Racism Department of the General Student Committee of my university (AStA).

## **The General Student Committee**

The AStA takes care of the students' concerns towards the university administrators and the state government. It communicates student interests to the public and politicians. A large number of representatives, who are elected for a two-semester term, work in various departments on different topics, such as educational policy, culture, ecology and sustainability, or anti-racism. The AStA also provides students with services such as a legal advice service free of charge. Consisting of about 23 people, the AStA is elected by the Student Parliament (StuPa) (27 people at the time). The StuPa is the highest decision-making body of the entire student body and is composed of several so-called lists, which can be understood as parties (i.e., the Greens or the Young Socialists). The students elect members of these parties directly and thus decide on the number of seats each party holds in the StuPa. The latter also makes decisions about the student body's budget, among other things. While the AStA functions operationally, the StuPa works predominantly legislatively.

Within the framework of the Anti-Racism Department of the AStA, I decided to look for possibilities to structurally manifest anti-racist thinking and action at the university and to tackle cases such as that of the seminar I have described above. As one of many departments at the AStA, the Anti-Racism Department is relatively free in what they can do, ranging from structural work with faculties or complaint management to planning film screenings, guest lectures or rallies. It is the representatives' job to create a concrete agenda and decide what projects, tasks or issues that serve the anti-racist cause they want to focus on. Being volunteers, the representatives receive small expense allowances.

Through networking with various committees and groups at the university, my two fellow representatives of the Anti-Racism Department and I were able to intervene in racist incidents, plan events, and initiate projects. However, from the beginning the legislature was characterized by a charged discussion about the size of the Anti-Racism Department. At the beginning of each legislative period, the StuPa not only elects new representatives, but also decides on the structure of the AStA, such as the number of departments and representatives, in a parliamentary session that usually takes place every three weeks.

While there are normally only one or two representatives per department, the Anti-Racism Department was to be staffed with three people when I applied. Although this was a success, it was not without consequences. After a successful legislature during my first year in the AStA, it was time to vote again. A new legislative period was coming up and, even before the election call, there were rumors that serious changes were to be made, especially concerning the Anti-Racism Department. On the basis of the events leading to this, various racialized emotions and, in turn, the consequences connected to them illustrate that racialized emotions are not merely "subjective" or "biased" but are in fact material forms of power and resistance to power that can have structural consequences, both positive and negative.

## **Structural Debates**

Set in a lecture hall that accommodates more than 100 students at one of the four campuses, the parliamentary session was run by the parliamentary board of three people. Attended by all 27 members of the StuPa, 12 AStA members<sup>6</sup>, nine applicants for the AStA and four more guests, people quickly and mostly sat with their political allies. The session started orderly by checking attendance, voting for the last sessions' minutes, and approving the session's agenda, with the main points being the AStA structure for the new legislature and a first election of new applicants.

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<sup>6</sup> Due to the end of the legislature many members had already resigned.

Even before the question of who would staff the Anti-Racism Department in the new legislative period was raised, the question was, as always, how many seats the various departments would receive. The first rumor turned out to be true. In a proposal put forward by certain parties in the StuPa, it was said that, alongside the Gender Politics Department, the Anti-Racism Department should also be cut from three seats to one. The reason for this was that they wanted to reduce the size of the AStA in general and that they could not see any successes achieved by the department to justify such a high number of representatives. After a statement, in which I remarked how odd it was to claim that one wants to reduce the size of the AStA by downsizing the anti-discriminatory departments, while at the same time other departments, such as the Public Relations Department, were to be enlarged, the discussion began. We pointed out that we not only had to deal with our own racist experiences during the legislature, but that our focus was also on structures that people who were not racialized did not have to consider and therefore most likely would not recognize. While we, as soon-to-be former representatives, argued for the preservation of the seats, with the support of a few non-white members in the StuPa, who could be counted on one hand, all but two of the white attendees completely refrained from supporting us openly. Although the students speaking out were outnumbered, a power dynamic quickly developed.

A reasonable discussion about the number of representatives turned into an almost desperate plea by BIPoC (Black, Indigenous and People of Color)<sup>7</sup> to convince the other white students of the importance of the Anti-Racism Department. Although we did not know how many people supported reducing the department, any silence, for the time being, indicated a possible dissenting vote. While I was increasingly uncomfortable and desperately trying to communicate our point of view factually and firmly, but not aggressively or too indignantly, the white people were at ease. The interesting thing is that I did not just mean the ones who disagreed with our opinion and sat back as we struggled, or the ones who did not say anything at all and were partially preoccupied with other things. I also mean the white people who supported us. Not only was their choice of words much more aggressive, but they also interrupted each other, got louder, and named things directly as sexist or racist. So, while we were trying to be tactical in a way that did not put more obstacles in our way, the white StuPa members ignored any diplomatic approach<sup>8</sup>. This became even more notable when two former, white AStA members crashed the session with a boombox playing anti-fascist songs, drinking beer, portraying their frustration with the parliament and everything that was happening. However, I do not highlight this to indicate admiration, but rather astonishment. White students were comfortable.

As Ahmed argues in *On Being Included: Racism and Diversity in Institutional life*, “[comfort] suggests well-being and satisfaction, but it can also suggest an ease and easiness” (Ahmed, 2012, p.40). She describes how white people are comfortable in situations because they do not expect structural consequences. The result is that emotions are given free rein because of an apparent understanding of structural discrimination that are however carried by white privilege, in the sense of not having to worry about structural consequences because of the way one reacts. At the same time, we, as Anti-Racism Department, were subsequently blamed for how some of those white people expressed themselves. Despite our discomfort and several outrageous alternative suggestions from students, we ended up winning at least two seats for the Anti-Racism Department. Satisfied and slightly proud of our perseverance, although not of the result, we nodded to each other while the opposing sides were patting themselves on the back for thinking they were benevolent. Reflecting on these emotions, I have to think of Bonilla-Silva (2019) analysing how

[white people], to highlight a positive emotion that has not received much attention, derive satisfaction and even pleasure in domination, while the subaltern derive the same emotions from resistance. (p.8)

As much as this is not supposed to essentialize the emotional outcomes of white people and people who face racism, I started wondering if this was the dynamic we had witnessed in the StuPa over and over again.

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<sup>7</sup> The term “BIPoC” includes Black people (B), Indigenous people (I), and People of Color (PoC). It specifically re-emphasizes anti-Black racism and discrimination against Indigenous peoples. In most contexts, the term has replaced the PoC term to reflect privilege even within racialized groups. The term is used here for simplification matters. However, it is not intended to render the many self-determinations of different people affected by racism invisible. Many racialized people do not self-identify with this, or in fact, other collective terms.

<sup>8</sup> This is not to say that I think people facing racism should generally be more diplomatic or bend to oppressive structures to achieve change or be respected. There are various ways of resistance that work differently in different contexts for different people.

## **Re-Elections**

After the long structural debate, the elections for the new legislature were coming up. While I changed to the Department of Educational Policy and Teaching, my two co-representatives applied again for the Anti-Racism Department. However, after one of them was re-elected, there were not enough votes for the second person. The second rumor was confirmed. Non-transparently, without prior announcement or an attempt to have a conversation, the second person (a female, Muslim, Hijabi) was not re-elected. StuPa members stated that she would be too aggressive, too unpleasant and would not have achieved enough. Despite the fact that the other representative and I kept referring to our joint annual reports, her working methods and achievements, there was nothing we could do, and we were already exhausted. The parliamentary session ended. In view of a new election round<sup>9</sup> at the next parliamentary session, we had conversations with individual StuPa parties, in which we tried to convince them to vote for her and to emphasize again and again that we were in the best position to judge how she worked. Furthermore, at the end of the day, it is not her job to get along with the people in the StuPa, but to do her job in the AStA and for the students. However, as it turned out after one of the interviews, the opinion of a single white man who was in the AStA with us and is now in the StuPa was enough to prevent her re-election a total of three times. Publicly, the person did not once comment on his opinion.

A striking point of criticism at the StuPa meeting was that [she] would speak too aggressively and would not contribute to a pleasant climate [at sessions]. A lot of things came together, but this sexist aspect shall be unmasked here once again: Female rage, especially of non-white women, is delegitimized, while at the same time male rage is seen as natural, with an almost benevolent and appreciative attitude. Women and girls should suppress their rage. If they do not do so, studies show that their anger is attributed to personality deficiencies (see “Can an angry woman get ahead?” – Victoria Brescoll). They are repeatedly told that their anger is not justified, that their anger would be an exaggeration, that it is unfeminine and ultimately to their disadvantage; and, thus, a reason not to be elected for the Anti-Racism Department. Yet anger is so bitterly necessary in this very department! [She] has to live up to a standard, which we do not find equally with male StuPa members. [Her] commitment to the department was emphasized several times and the two other [representatives] who staffed the department with [her] also stood up for her—and who can better evaluate [her] work than her immediate colleagues? Instead, in addition to the struggle for recognition of the department itself and the places it provides, the work and value of an active, great anti-racist has to be seen to be undermined and devalued. (AStA XXIV of the University of Potsdam, 2020)

What took place in the StuPa under the claim of a so-called unbiased staff decision marks one of the high points of racialized emotions in the StuPa. Not only do we have to understand the perception of an emotion as “aggressive” intersectionally, but this debate also triggered emotions within the framework of anger, indignation, defensiveness, and stubbornness among the white StuPa members and parties who voted against the representative. I will not reproduce individual statements again. However, what is clear is that, more importantly than the issue of people being treated in a racist and sexist way, is the preservation of white people’s own “innocence” and feelings. Supported by angry statements, it becomes more important to publicly deny the experiences of people affected by racism than to attribute truth to their emotions.

## **Changing Plans**

After the failed re-elections, complete resignation, and tears of exhaustion, the previously re-elected person also resigned from the Anti-Racism Department. New people were to be elected to the department. Due to the fact that former representatives are included in the interviews of new representatives, we then decided to at least look for responsible successors. While we were particularly enthusiastic about two of the three applicants, we tried to get the third one, who was also applying for the International Students Department, elected there, since she was an international student herself. We pointed out how important her anti-racist work would be in the International Students Department and thus considered multiplying the anti-racist work in the AStA through other departments as well. A personal conversation with the applicant, which the leftist parties in the StuPa that tried to support us

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<sup>9</sup> Elections take place until the position is filled and as long as the people are running (most people do not run again after not being elected the first time). So, if in one electoral StuPa session the person is not voted in, the election is moved to the next one, and so on and so forth.

persuaded us to hold, however, proved to be a big mistake. The attempt to get all the applicants into the AStA was alleged to be a form of pressuring and manipulating. We were shocked to learn that, while thinking we were fighting solely for our own interests, we were somewhat used by leftist StuPa members to push their “anti-racist agenda” under the pretext of its importance to ourselves and kept taking the fall for the resulting backlash. Instead of the StuPa members who claimed to support us trying to make a change on their own, they were constantly pushing us to make a move, just as we had done during the re-election of the former representative when we spoke to opposing parties and gave statements. My two former co-representatives were no longer in the AStA. However, I was now accused of gunning for power and of wanting to shape the AStA according to my own interests, infiltrating it with people I wanted, and my personal agenda, as I allegedly had already done by changing my department to Educational Policy and Teaching. At the same time, the other StuPa members pitted us and the new applicant against each other.

While my explanations were not taken seriously and I desperately tried to explain to the left parties of the StuPa what had happened and that I needed them to step up, the weight of racialized emotions opened up to me again: insecurity and discomfort versus ease. At the same time, I tried to clarify to the new representative what the initial intention was and to ensure that BIPoCs would not be pit against each other. Just as Ahmed pointed out, and Bonilla-Silva repeats, “[...] domination itself produces both material (Mills, 2003) and emotional well-being among members of the dominant race.” (Bonilla-Silva, 2019, p.7) This feeling of well-being may not be universal or even always conscious, yet it must be emphasized that it is not first expressed as particularly “good” feelings, but simply by not feeling “bad” due to not having worries.

After all that happened, the supporters of the Anti-Racism Department changed their tactics. Once again, an application for a third seat in the Anti-Racism Department was to be made. However, much more than being able to get the third candidate elected, it was mainly about the lost time of anti-racist work due to all these disputes. Although I promised myself I would not get involved in these efforts, I could not remain silent in the discussion about the application in the StuPa. An intense discussion broke out between me and a white person from the StuPa who had been instrumental in the opposition throughout the process. It was the culmination of months of emotional regulation on my part and the end of my emotional restraint. After I angrily expressed how problematic the interaction and communication with the Anti-Racism Department had been, how much the opinions and feelings of BIPoCs were ignored, and how fundamentally the StuPa contributed to structural discrimination, the situation escalated. Angrily and defensively, I was accused of being personally insulting, manipulative, and not factual and objective; just as in the situation with my professor mentioned in the beginning. StuPa members no longer wanted to participate in the discussion and stated that they did not want to be put under pressure by the Anti-Racism Department. Anti-discrimination should not be forced, they said. One person who expressed their frustration with me left the session in a fury. Of course, this is not the first time I had observed what some would call “white fragility” being played out. Nevertheless, I was overwhelmed by its magnitude. The parties commented on my behavior. Some StuPa members shared with me that some people’s opinions of me had changed for the worse. Others felt the need to tell me they did not agree with all my opinions but that they understood me. I heard that the abovementioned frustrated StuPa member could not sleep because of me and that he was in a bad place. Suddenly I was the aggressive, power-hungry oppressor. Nobody asked me how I was doing. No one tried to understand what I was trying to say. No one saw the overall effect of the events in the StuPa. Once again, white people’s feelings and emotions were the focus of what was happening, while mine were the problem. After months of emotional regulation, the end of my patience seemed to overshadow everything I had accomplished, or rather everything we had accomplished, everything we stood for, all our efforts.

The results:

1. One of the new representatives of the Anti-Racism Department resigned out of shock about the racist events and statements in the StuPa.
2. The Anti-Racism Department had not been fully staffed for about five months (a legislature is approximately 12 months long).
3. I withdrew from dealing with the issue and no longer interacted with the StuPa.

### **Power and Emotion:**

Unfortunately, it would take too long to explain the dynamics inside the AStA and the StuPa themselves, as well as between the two bodies in more detail. However, it is significant to look at the bigger picture. As pointed out by

DeCuir-Gunby and Williams (2007) in *The Impact of Race and Racism on Students' Emotions: A Critical Race Analysis*, few scholars examine the impact of race-related issues on students' emotions. "The dialogue on race and racism is often one of difficulty. It often elicits many emotions, especially unpleasant emotions" (DeCuir-Gunby & Williams, 2007, p.215). I have thought at length about how to explain the situations described, and the easiest way is through their consequences. As described above, every racialized emotion is consequential. Racialized emotions can result in forms of resistance, structural changes, and emotional battles, but, most importantly, they tend to strongly re-enforce racial dominance. Oftentimes they mark whose emotions and feelings have a right to be and have to be taken into consideration when making decisions or expressing opinions.

What is described here is essentially the same dominance mentioned regarding knowledge. If we think back to the classroom situation described in the beginning, and remember whose knowledge is dominant and considered legitimate, we find that this goes hand in hand with the emotional component of the situation. The perception and handling of knowledge and emotions are a product of white supremacy and a form of epistemic violence.

As we can learn from Grosfoguel and other scholars, white supremacy is constituted by its history. Any form of past oppression has ultimately resulted in the structural upliftment of white people, specifically men. (see Grosfoguel, 2013)

Racism and power structures were strengthened through European practices that included capturing land, killing people, colonizing, enslaving, and attempting to "scientifically" demonstrate the inferiority of people by positing racial theories and suppressing and wiping out indigenous knowledges. (Camufingo, 2018, p.10)

Part of this epistemic privilege is the power of definition over the "other." If I erase people and their knowledge, prevent them from recording their knowledge or distributing it, then one form of racist knowledge hierarchies is to produce images.

[...] the subordinate other is ideologically painted as weak (so as to need protection or discipline) and yet periodically as threatening to break the ideological boundary in riot or hysteria. (Lutz & Abu-Lughod, 1990, p.78)

Thus, the emotions of the "others" become a kind of observed symptom of inferiority and more or less objectivized as subjective. Emotions are not only degraded to irrational subjective reactions, but they are also used to justify oppression. Being afraid of someone and depicting them as a threat and/or emotionally out of control again creates an image of innocence on the one hand and an acceptance of "regulation from the outside" on the other. We find this historical continuity in dynamics such as those in the student parliament as well. White people in the StuPa, for example, perceive our emotional efforts as a struggle for power that is erratic and threatening—when, through their emotional responses, they reinforce their own power by dismissing the need for anti-discrimination work to be done.

As helpful as the concept of white fragility might be here to understand certain emotional reactions to racism-related criticism, this is not sufficient. Not only are we dealing with white emotions, as well as the emotions of people affected by racism, but we see that, in addition to the negative emotions evoked by white fragility, we also have to deal with positively connoted emotions. Any emotion in the context of racialized situations can be a trigger for intended and unintended consequences of an interaction. In this respect, "[...] emotion can be defined as being 'about' social relations; emotional meaning systems will reflect those relations and will, through emotion's constitution of social behaviour, structure them. In addition, social and economic structures are related to the way in which persons or selves are constructed more generally" (Lutz & White, 1986, p.420).

What Lutz and White are describing by analysing emotions and social relations can be seen in the power dynamics that are at play in all forms of daily interactions. The meaning and perception of emotions is always a reflection of dynamics that are more complex than personal character. Especially when we speak of racialized emotions, it becomes clear how "[...] at least in the West, emotion discourses may be one of the most likely and powerful devices by which domination proceeds" (Lutz & Abu-Lughod, 1990, p.78). Regardless of whether consciously or subconsciously, and again without trying to essentialize here, "emotion can be seen as a strategy for defending a group's preferred type of social organization" (Lutz & White, 1986, p.420). Emotion therefore becomes a tool that



tends to serve a dominant society by upholding structures such as white supremacy, often without people even noticing.

What is critical here is not only recognizing that this goes beyond seminars and teaching content, but that they directly affect each other. The course mentioned above only marks one of many examples of that relation. The epistemic violence that universities maintain in terms of how they construct what knowledge is and who gets to “know,” is being replicated in the actions of students as they try to make sense of themselves in these spaces outside of the classroom. Universities are not objective, rational, non-emotional spaces, and nor can or should they be. However, by not acknowledging that and effectively deconstructing that way of thinking, they not only continuously educate white students to center themselves, but they are also not teaching them to critically question their positions in society and their reactions to structural criticism that disturb their comfort zones.

What I am addressing in this article is at the same time what makes writing it so difficult for me. As I try to process and reflect on my emotions, I am constantly tempted to delete “too” emotional statements, to want to sound more “objective” and to conform to an academic standard that I am actually criticizing. It is a conscious act of resistance to feel and write counter stories; to create knowledge through emotion. The point is that we feel.

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