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Introduction

Race-ism

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On 11 August 2017 a so-called 'Unite the Right' rally was held in Charlottesville (USA) at the University of Virginia. The organizers protested against the removal of a statue of Robert E. Lee, a controversial commander of the Confederate States Army. The event attracted Alt-Right supporters and neo-Nazis, screaming through the streets 'Blood and Soil!' and 'White Lives Matter!' A day later, the group gathered in the streets again, but now faced counter-protesters rallying against racism and white supremacy. Tensions rose and a dramatic turn of events led to the death of the 32-year-old Heather Heyer, an anti-racist protester. 20-year-old James Alex Fields Jr., known to have Nazi-sympathies, killed her when he deliberately drove his car with high speed into the peaceful crowd. Many others were injured. In the aftermath of the event President Donald Trump stated: 'We condemn in the strongest possible

terms this egregious display of hatred, bigotry and violence on many sides, on many sides'. The President was heavily critiqued for his reluctance to explicitly name and condemn white supremacists, and for his portrayal of the events whereby he seemed to imply that both sides were equally to blame for the fatal tragedy.

A year later on the other side of the Atlantic, violence erupted in Chemnitz (Germany). In the early morning of 26 August 2018, a brawl resulted in the fatal stabbing of a 35-year-old man of German-Cuban origins. The suspected perpetrators turned out to be a 23-year-old Syrian and a 22-year-old Iraqi migrant. Protests, riots and clashes between right- and left-wing protesters erupted the same afternoon and lasted for a couple of days. The incident reignited the debates on 'immigration' and the 'refugee crisis'. Markus Frohn-

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maier, a politician of the far right party *Alternative für Deutschland* stated on his Twitter account: 'When the state can no longer protect citizens, people will go into the streets and protect themselves. Simple as that! Today it is a citizen's duty to stop the death-bringing "mass migration". This could have happened to your father, son or brother'.¹ A video on social media in which persons of colour were chased and attacked in the streets intensified the debate. Angela Merkel spoke of a '*Hetzjagd*', a hunt on migrants, and forcefully denounced the violence of both the far and extreme-right.

These are just two illustrations of recent and disturbing episodes of violence that present the highly polarized climate in which 'race' is prominently used for establishing boundaries and acts as an explicit marker of identity. This is not only expressed in words, narratives or political slogans, but it is also acted out in dramatic, violent and highly politicized performances. Our times can be described as 'Troubled Times', as was done by the Dutch Anthropological Association (ABV) that took it as its central theme of its 2018 gathering. This issue of *Etnofoor* has been inspired by this day and theme. While one could say that times are eternally 'troubled', this issue focuses specifically on the increasing prominence of race and racism in today's world and contemporary mainstream politics. It asks how anthropology deals with, and positions itself, with regard to the above mentioned rise of the Alt-Right, white supremacy and how it can examine populist movements that play on skin colour, religion, heritage, emotions of belonging and fear of the other. Is there a need to rethink race and racism, or do we consider ourselves sufficiently equipped to analyse current chal-

lenges, based on the long tradition of anthropological studies into these concepts?

As nationalist, radical and extreme right sentiments grow, we simultaneously see counter-movements on the rise that increase awareness about structural forms of inequality, protest against state and police violence, and call for decolonizing universities, curricula, museums and entire cities. These movements bring us ideas and voices that show a dire need for change and for acknowledgment of the pain race-ism inflicts.

The cover of this issue shows such a counter-voice. It features the work *Black Skin* by the Israeli artist Niv Cohen, whose work is heavily influenced by the racism he experienced throughout his life as a Yemenite Jew in Israel. The idea of 'shedding his skin' is not only related to the colour of his skin, which positions him closer to his Arab surroundings than his supposedly white Jewish in-group. It also represents the shedding of his Mizrahi (Jewish Arab) identity and culture to fit in with his 'white' surrounding, or the expectation of him doing so.

Besides artists, anthropologists increasingly take up such issues of identity and polarizing discussions of race and racism. But is this involvement limited to de-constructing and contextualizing the term and its use and if so in what ways should this be done? Or is there a need, as Paul Stoller proposes in his recent call, for a more engaged public anthropology?² For example, how should we deal with racism in our classrooms today, and how can we best engage students in these debates regarding race? How 'coloured' are our own curricula and teaching materials?

This issue will not be able to fully answer all the above-mentioned questions, but the various academic

voices that it encompasses hopefully contribute to a further reflection on race-ism in two ways. First, by providing *ideas* and analytical tools to strengthen and expand our understanding of race and racism; and second, by offering some concrete *scripts of action* on how to decolonize, break down dominant racial images, and critically reflect on our discipline both inside and outside the classrooms.

The first part of this issue contains three articles that show how various forms of racialized Othering are entangled both with the past (colonialism) and the present (economic and refugee 'crises'). The article written by Sherilyn Deen, *Tracing Pasts and Colonial Numbness: Decolonial Dynamics in the Netherlands*, discusses the struggle of anti-racist and decolonial activists in the Netherlands. This struggle is centered around raising awareness and facing the oppressive Dutch colonial past, slavery and institutional racism. It is a struggle that disrupts the dominant image of the Dutch nation as highly moral and innocent (see also Wekker 2016). Deen shows how these appeals for a greater historical awareness are frequently dismissed and delegitimized by national politicians and reframed into a matter of 'individual emotions'.

The contribution of Thiago Pinto Barbosa, Owen Brown, Julia Kirchner and Julia Scheurer, *Remembering the Anthropological Making of Race in Today's University: An Analysis of a Students' Memorial Project in Berlin*, provides a concrete example and practical insights on how to decolonize our university classroom/buildings. The authors, former students of the Free University of Berlin, discuss their research project and exhibition 'Manufacturing Race', in which they traced the colonial and Nazi-past of the institute and building where they

were studying. By uncovering the past and displaying its connection to the present, they aimed with their project to motivate students to critically think and engage with 'the history of their own disciplines' role in the making of racialized knowledge'.

Marilena Drymioti and Vassilis Gerasopoulos focus less on the past and more on the present in their article *Entangling the Migration and the Economic 'Crisis': Claiming What's Rightfully Greek*. They discuss the relationship between the rise of racism and xenophobia in Greece and the refugee and economic 'crises'. The authors claim, through methodological and analytical collaboration, that 'racism and xenophobia in post-austerity Greece are largely justified and negotiated on economic grounds rather than merely racial'. Similar to Deen, Drymioti and Gerasopoulos stress the important role that national elites and politicians play in these negotiations. Whereas Deen convincingly points to the *denial and attenuation* of racism by Dutch political leaders, Drymioti and Gerasopoulos stress how the far-right political organization Golden Dawn *emphasizes and explicitly feeds* xenophobic and racist sentiments.

The second part of this issue is made up of four shorter essays: the first two focus on the decolonization of anthropology, while the last two discuss the making and (un)making of race and racism. In contrast to some of the other contributions in this issue, Peter Pels argues that anthropology should never be fully decolonized. In particular, he emphasizes that 'new demands for decolonization run the risk of younger generations forgetting what "post colonialism" was about'. Jasmijn Rana, in turn, stresses that decolonizing anthropology is a continuous process. Although anthropologists

increasingly study their 'own' societies rather than the 'exotic' in far away places, there is still a tendency to identify and focus on the 'other' and the 'strange' (in the case of the Netherlands: 'Muslims', 'Moroccans', 'the allochthone'). Rana argues: 'We still tend to study down, rather than study up'. She concludes that we need to keep asking ourselves questions about our research practices and the type of knowledge we produce as anthropologists.

The third essay written by Francio Guadeloupe discusses the practice of racial imagining of humans in what he calls 'the closed circuit of Integral Reality', which blinds us to see 'non-racial senses of identity or rather our singularities' and results in foremostly seeing a 'racial vision of humanity'. In this work Guadeloupe sees hopeful and inspiring examples in urban popular culture that can potentially open up this closed circuit and 'demolish the suffocating masks of racial images'.

Finally, the essay by Pooyan Tamimi Arab encourages us to study the making and unmaking of race and racism by looking at it through all of the senses, paying attention to the 'eye' and the 'ear'. Tamimi Arab claims in his work that the opposition to amplified Islamic sounds could be interpreted as racism. He shows that while the visual idea of race remains crucial, studies of the sonic or olfactory logics of race can add to our understanding of the phenomenon.

Combined, this issue aims to provide thought-provoking ideas, analytical tools to study race-ism, and examples to decolonize, or break down persistent racial images. In his keynote speech on the Dutch Anthropological Day (May 2018), Ghassan Hage stated that those who want to combat racism often focus too strongly on showing that racists are 'empirically wrong'.

However, as Hage explained, racism is above all a performative affective practice. Racism is effective, mainly because it hurts. The main challenge and task, as Hage proposed, is therefore not to come up with alternative empirical facts to convince 'racists', but to counter the forces and formulate strategies of protection. Strategies to protect against the direct violence in Charlottesville and Chemnitz, and strategies to protect against the underlying structural violence that contributed to the production of these tragic events.

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Notes

- 1 See Frohnmaier's tweet on 26 August 2018: '*Wenn der Staat die Bürger nicht mehr schützen kann, geben die Menschen auf die Straße und schützen sich selber. Ganz einfach! Heute ist es Bürgerpflicht, die todbringendendie [sic] „Messermigration“ zu stoppen! Es hätte deinen Vater, Sohn oder Bruder treffen können!*' https://twitter.com/Frohnmaier_AfD/status/1033806135990644744 (accessed on 30 November 2018).
- 2 https://www.huffingtonpost.com/entry/doing-anthropology-in-troubled-times_us_5a1c4300e4b0e580b35371c5?guccounter=2 (accessed on 30 November 2018).

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