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THE POWER OF IMAGES

Portrayal of Africa in German Textbooks and
Symbolic Violence

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WHAT IS RACISM?

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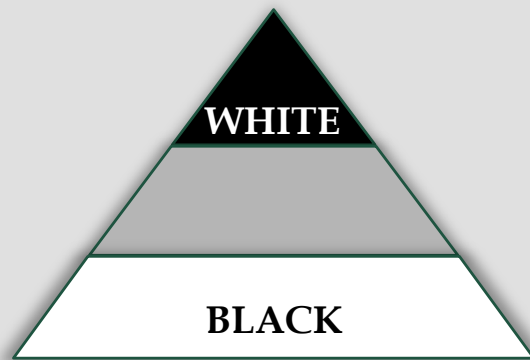
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- Modern racism was conceived in the 18th century Europe, during the age of Enlightenment as a legitimization of colonialism and enslavement

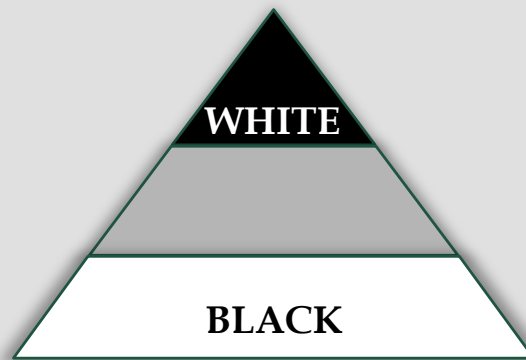
FUNDAMENTAL IDEAS

HIERARCHY OF RACES (KANT)



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ANTITHESIS (HEGEL)

AFRICAN

- unfree
- unreasonable
- irrational
- lacking will

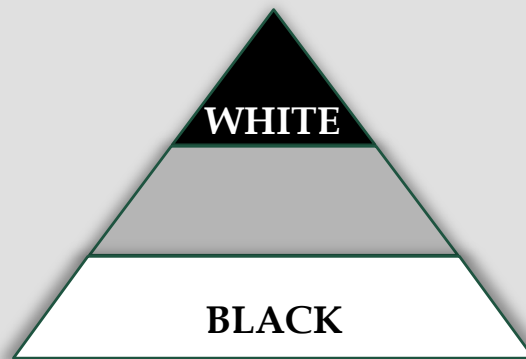


EUROPEAN

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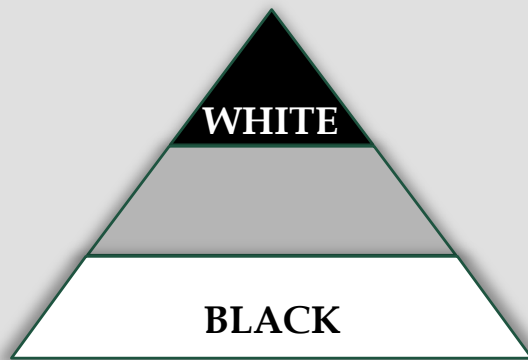
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AFRICA HAS NO HISTORY (HEGEL)

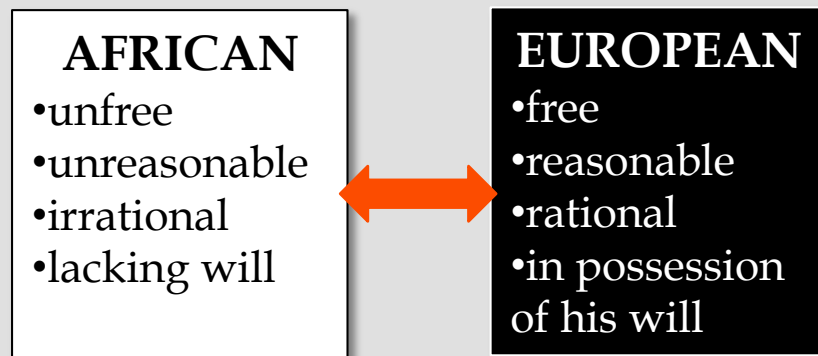


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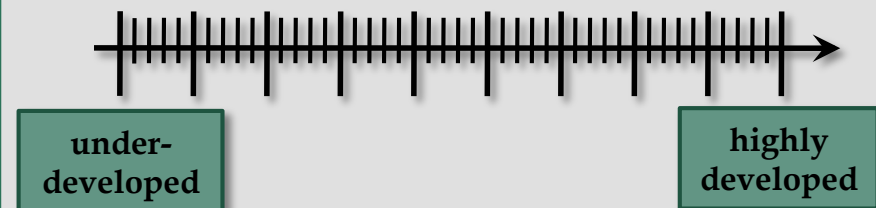
ANTITHESIS (HEGEL)



AFRICA HAS NO HISTORY (HEGEL)



NARRATIVE OF MODERNITY



RACISM IN GERMANY

- Colonialism overshadowed by the crimes of the NS-Regime
- Racism widely considered a taboo
- Africans long perceived as people who came from afar, unwelcome and expected to leave
- Afro-Germans are “Others from Without” as opposite to “Others from Within” in US, UK and France (Wright, 2003)

SYMBOLIC VIOLENCE

- Bourdieu (1998) defines symbolic violence as a form of dominance over conscious subjects which remains unrecognized by the latter
- By applying an identical value system as those who dominate them, the dominated subjects perpetuate a social structure which exerts the dominance over them

METHODS

CASE STUDY IN AN URBAN SCHOOL

7th grade, 117 students ages 12-13 (nearly 10% of African ancestry)

- Visual analysis, social science textbook
- Structured attitude questionnaires
- Focus group interview, purposeful sampling

FINDINGS

VISUAL ANALYSIS

- Black people are largely excluded from contemporary German society
- Black people are not presented as equal participants of the society, instead their functions are: a victim, a protégé and a stranger
- Africans are portrayed as passive, submissive, suffering and naïve
- If white people appear on the same image, they are always depicted as wealthy, active and dominant

VISUAL ANALYSIS

- African maps only serve to illustrate European colonial conquest
- The regions not conquered by the Europeans are left white and void suggesting that the continent was void of civilisation and history before the arrival of the Europeans
- The denotation, connotation and context of these images transmit all four fundamental ideas of racist ideology

VISUAL ANALYSIS



- Similar images of African famines have been widely criticised for their voyeuristic exposure
- They construct Africans as dependent victims of natural disasters by concealing their self-sufficiency and self-determination

FINDINGS

FOCUS GROUP

- Students of African descent perceive the image as very offensive
- Eye-catching, students find it independent of whether the topic was covered in the lesson
- Provokes very strong reactions resulting in verbal and psychological assaults

FOCUS GROUP

- Interviewed students describe the voyeuristic behaviour of their peers who find pleasure in the starving children's misery

SOLOMON: ...*the students say: That is so disgusting!*

CHRIS: ... *and then they laugh, they really laugh about it*

FOCUS GROUP

- The other students feel a sense of superiority towards the starving children
- They immediately identify starving children with their peers of African ancestry thus projecting the feeling of superiority towards them

EMMA: ... *they immediately look at me...*

CHRIS: ... *yes, you are also dark...*

KWAME: ...*some children think I am also poor.*

FOCUS GROUP

- When asked how these textbook images make them feel, the students of African ancestry responded with “*upset*”, “*bad*”, “*not so good*”, “*awkward*” and “*humiliated*”

NATAN: *I feel awkward, because when you see African pictures (pictures of Africa N/A), there are only bad things to be found. There is never anything good to be found. And this... this... this is quite humiliating.*

FOCUS GROUP

- Children of African ancestry were very well able to explain the racist incidents these images trigger as well as their causes and impacts

EMMA: But the photographers go there and take only this kind of pictures on purpose, and show it to the people as if Africa was so extraordinarily poor

KWAME: It is that some think everyone from Africa is the same

DAVID: Africa is a very rich continent with oil and diamonds and all ... but how should I say? Europe has stolen things from them

FOCUS GROUP

- None of interviewed students has ever tried to explain the situation to their peers
- Their coping strategies are reduced to anger and aggression, for which they then get punished

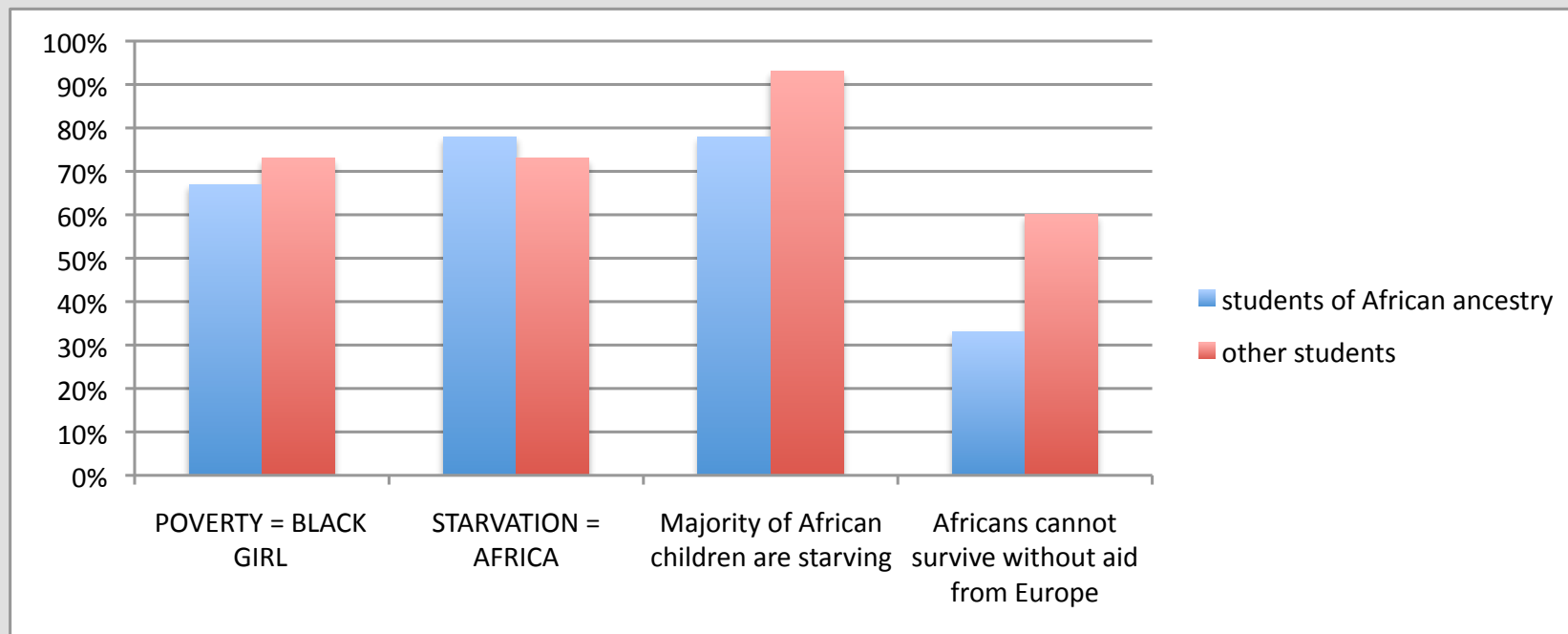
CHRIS: I get also aggressive in a case like this and I yell.

JAMAL: I get angry, yes and when I insult someone I am told to go to the training room ... yes, I get very angry

FINDINGS

QUESTIONNAIRES

- Students' of African ancestry attitudes towards Africa and Black people in regard to poverty are similar to those of the other students



FINDINGS

FOCUS GROUP PART II



SOUP KITCHEN IN BERLIN

NIGEL:

Not only some blacks are starving but also whites as shown here

FOCUS GROUP PART II



PROF. LH SEUKWA

NIGEL:

*Not only whites can be professors,
also blacks can*

SYMBOLIC VIOLENCE

- Some students of African ancestry use “Africa” as their reference point of misery
- “White” is their reference point of power and success but also of science and other symbols of modern achievements
- “*Not only*” and “*also*” define exceptions of this rule which is otherwise accepted and uncontested

CONCLUSIONS

- Interviewed students of African ancestry just like all other students seem to be manipulated by the sometimes open and often concealed racist system that successfully teaches them to employ the very same norms and values which exclude them and term them inferior
- It might explain their expressed inability to defend themselves against racist injuries in class even though they seem to be recognizing the violence exerted and triggered by the visual images of Africa in their textbook
- The symbolic character of this violence might impede development of constructive coping strategies and might have a distorting impact on the children's self-image