Democratising Switzerland: Challenging Whiteness in Public Space

Patricia Purtschert

Every last seat is taken in the large room at the PROGR *Zentrum für Kulturproduktion* (Cultural Center) in Bern, Switzerland's capital, on the evening of 25 August 2016. A Black woman in a shirt and tie speaks to the people assembled: 'In the name of the Kanak Tribunal, I warmly welcome you all to the trial in the case of the "Bern Moor." […] We have gathered here to discuss the tabooisation and banalisation of racism and its critique on the basis of the debate on images of the moor in Bern today.'[1] With these opening words, she performatively calls into being the Kanak Tribunal along with her own role as the chair. The Tribunal goes on late into the night. There are accusations and defences, along with numerous extensive testimonies concerning the case of the 'Bern Moor.'

P. Purtschert (✉)
University of Bern, Bern, Switzerland

The Kanak Tribunal in Bern is exemplary of a certain kind of contemporary culture of anti-racist resistance in Switzerland in which people of colour and their white allies create alternative spaces where discussions on race and racism, which are avoided in public space, can take place. Moreover, they challenge the widespread notion that recent migration patterns are solely responsible for creating 'racial difference' within a formerly white nation.

The notion of Switzerland as inherently white is also currently being challenged by a growing historical strand of research that sheds light on non-white accounts of Swiss history (for example, Pinto 2013; Jain 2018; Fischer-Tiné 2015; Schär 2016). These alternative narratives show the nation's whiteness has always been a construct, which presupposes the exclusion of non-white actors, movements and knowledges. In contemporary Switzerland, whiteness is produced and normalised through a regime of 'racelessness' (Goldberg 2006, p. 226) that is widespread throughout Europe and was established in the mid-twentieth century. However, 'racelessnes,' does not mean that race does not exist (any longer). It refers to the paradox that although race continues to play an important role in (Western-)European societies, there is hardly any language or social recognition that would make it possible to name or reflect upon this 'unspoken subtext' (Goldberg 2006, p. 335). The development of this 'racism without races' (Balibar 1991, p. 21) is commonly attributed to two distinct historical processes. First, following the Second World War, the Shoah became the main point of reference for the continued use of race (Goldberg 2006, p. 336). The international denunciation of the genocidal practices under National Socialist and fascist regimes that were based on ideas of race led to an official renunciation of the term. Second, after decolonisation, migration from ex-colonies into the former colonial motherlands increased. Thus, from the point of view of white supremacy, new rationales were needed in order to counter and regulate these developments. In other words, it was no longer necessary to explain why Europeans who had intruded on non-European lands were naturally assumed to be the masters of the colonised population. Instead, arguments were needed that helped explain why migration from the South to the North was problematic and had to be restricted.

The regime of 'racelessness' was conducive to both processes. On the surface, it seemed that the problem of race had vanished from Europe as a consequence of the Shoah and its horrific genocidal practices.

Simultaneously, however, it facilitated arguments against migration from the postcolony. Thus, a new kind of racism emerged, which, 'at first sight, does not postulate the superiority of certain groups or peoples in relation to others but 'only' the harmfulness of abolishing frontiers, the incompatibility of life-styles and traditions' (Balibar 1991, p. 21). The idea that people should not mingle—as their roots were in their home-lands and that they should stay in the place they were born—made the phenomenon of migration seem exceptional and undesirable, and also allowed Europe to imagine itself as an intrinsically white space.

Recent studies have shown that the regime of racelessness is also part of Switzerland's discursive landscape, where, in Noémi Michel's (2016, p. 400) words, an 'unnameable racism' prevails. As Anne Lavanchy (2015, p. 278) asserts, Switzerland 'may be a race-mute society, but it is far from being race-blind.' On the one hand, this implies that race is rarely ever articulated or deemed a socially relevant category. On the other hand, race continues to be decisive for the ways people are judged, addressed, approached, classified, perceived, included or excluded. As Jovita dos Santos Pinto (2014, p. 120) concludes, the silent acceptance of whiteness as a parameter of belonging means that 'Switzerland is still imagined as a White space.' According to this view, the presence of people of colour in Switzerland only dates back to the migration or refugee movements that started in the 1970s. This situates non-white people, spatially and temporally, outside the national narrative, which simultaneously, as Francesca Falk argues (2015, pp. 155–166), denies that migration has played a constitutive role in Swiss history.

In the following, I discuss two movements of resistance that seek to articulate this silenced racialisation processes and thereby to offer alternative visions of Switzerland. As I will argue, these two cases not only enable a different understanding of how access to the public is racially structured, they also provide us with an understanding of democracy that requires the decolonisation of the public sphere.

First Exemplary Case: Countering Swiss Commodity Racism

On 28 October 2014, an open letter that was signed by over eighty people was sent to the Swiss department store chain Migros. Its authors, Pamela Ohene-Nyako, Max Lobe, Julian Droux, Fanny Toutou-Mpondo and Huguette Yéré demanded Migros withdraw their current

advertisement for Total laundry detergent. The advertisement image in question showed a brown teddy bear that turns white after having been washed with the soap. The protest letter takes issue with how the image links colour to pollution, since the bear on the picture is not dirty but brown. The letter concludes that the advertisement takes up the racist idea that people of African descent were unclean and places the advertisement in line with a history of commodity racism.[2]

It is not a coincidence that a detergent advertisement was targeted in this recent anti-racist campaign in Switzerland. As Anne McClintock shows, racist images and contents were widely distributed through novel channels in the burgeoning consumer culture of the late nineteenth century. By taking 'scenes of empire into every corner of the home, stamping images of colonial conquest on soap boxes, matchboxes, biscuit tins, whiskey bottles, tea tins and chocolate bars,' (McClintock 1995, p. 209) advertisements became a major vehicle of this 'commodity racism.' The imperial worldview predominant in the *fin de siècle* proved to be central to a capitalist economy of desire that was fuelled by colonial images. Racialised figures of non-white others and exotic sceneries not only made products look desirable, but they also allowed white European consumers to imagine themselves as imperial rulers. Regarding the German context, David Ciarlo (2011, p. 306) states that the powerful images that commodity racism brought forth 'invited viewers—everyday Germans—into the position of colonial master, receiving the goods of the world.' Soap played a specific role in staging imperial culture, since it was associated with physical and moral purity and with the racial supremacy of whiteness (McClintock 1995, pp. 210ff.).

However, commodity racism was also challenged through anti-racist critiques. In '*Peau noire, masques blancs*' (Black Skin, White Mask) Frantz Fanon describes how Black people are affected by images of the devout and entertaining Black servant so widely spread by commodity culture: 'The black man gives Madame the new "dark Creole colors" for her pure nylons, […] her "imaginative, coil-like" bottles of Golliwog toilet water and perfume […]. Service with a smile, every time' (Fanon 1986, pp. 34f.). As Fanon's examples shows, Blackness is commodified in several ways simultaneously. While the consumer products are marketed using racialied colours and signs, a Black servant hands them over to the white consumer as if they were a Black gift to white culture. This performative staging of the colonial gift erases the signs of violence underlying imperial trade relations. At the same time, such images

violently impact people of colour's perception and self-perception. Noémi Michel (2016, p. 247) speaks of 'rituals of race' that are forced upon racially marked subjects through 'verbal, scopic, consumerist and fantasmatic' invocations. In her reading of Fanon, she points out that in the early twentieth century, such racialising practices 'occur across various public spaces: the walls of the street, human zoos in national fairs and the transnational and trans-imperial routes of colonial goods' (ibid., p. 247). The contemporary movement that brings light to and protests the racist portrayals in the advertisement for Total detergent belongs to a lineage of resistance against such racialising advertisement.

The Deadly Question

A few days after the protest letter against the advertisement was published, one of the initiators of the open letter, the writer Max Lobe, published a short story with the title 'No, my little bear does not turn white!' in Geneva's daily newspaper *Le Courrier*. It is the story of an uncle who is about to take his five-year-old nephew to the dentist. After leaving the house, they come across the advertisement of the said campaign. The child wonders whether the animal on the picture was his beloved teddy Pipou. As the two approach the billboard, the child asks his uncle why the Pipou on the poster loses its colour. '*Voilà la question qui tue*' ('here it is, the deadly question'), writes Lobe (2014). He describes how the uncle stops smiling and how the child does not get an answer to his question. 'What to tell a Black child who is hardly five years old in the face of this advertisement. […] Do I need to tell him that the little bear is bleached because the colour brown or black is a colour of impurity and white is a colour of cleanliness?' (Lobe 2014). In his text, Lobe describes how the advertisement constitutes a racist interpellation within the public sphere. Even though the protagonist has something else in mind—he wants to take his nephew to the dentist—the unforeseen encounter with the image appals him and forces him to react. The difficulty of the situation is reinforced by the presence of a small child who brings up the 'deadly question.'

But why is it a 'deadly' question? To begin with, the question 'kills' the carefree and intimate moment between an adult and a child walking in the public sphere, it kills their laughter and joy. It does so by bringing up racism as a system of inequality with numerous deadly effects—from the historical legacies of the trans-atlantic slavery and colonialism to

the unequal access to health care and social welfare, racial profiling and the criminalisation of the Black population (Davis 2016). The question is also deadly because a racialised form of violence is forced upon the relationship between the uncle and his nephew. The adult's unbearable task is to teach the child about racism, to explain him why people find it acceptable to publicly watch the bleaching of Blackness, and at the same time to protect him from the harm that racism causes. What makes his task even worse is that the spectacle of white-washing is entangled with Pipou, the boy's beloved stuffed animal and thus affects the child's most intimate feelings.

What Lobe masterfully shows in this short piece is how the public sphere in Switzerland is anything but racially neutral. On the contrary, the display of racism in the public permeates the relationships of Black people and affects their sense of freedom and belonging. As Sara Ahmed (2006, p. 111) writes, racism forces a white perspective on the Black other: 'Racism ensures that the black gaze returns to the black body, which is not a loving return but rather follows the line of the hostile white gaze. The disorientation affected by racism diminishes capacities for action.' Lobe's protagonist experiences this disorientation spatially, intellectually and emotionally. His path is interrupted, his conversation becomes thwarted by the necessity to explain a racist image to a Black child, and he is forced to face the 'deadliness' of an everyday racism on public display. His story shows how people of colour are exposed to a 'bodily and social experience of restriction, uncertainty, and blockage' (ibid., p. 139).

This aspect is central to Lobe's short story, which begins with the declaration that the protagonist would have never accepted his sister's request that he take his nephew to the dentist, had he known the racist advertisement was there in front of his house. This opening demonstrates how the non-white actors move and go about their daily routines, but also how their relationships are obstructed by public racism. Whiteness, on the contrary, as Ahmed (2006, p. 128) argues, constitutes 'a series of action […] that allow some bodies to take up space by restricting the mobility of others.' While whiteness is linked to spatial expansion and freedom of movement, Blackness is tied to the restriction of mobility due to racist images, hostile white gazes or racial profiling. Lobe's short story shows how racism effectively limits the ways in which non-white people can move in a racialised space and how this affects their intimate relations.

How does Lobe manage to reveal the racialisation of the public space, given that the premise of racelessness, as Michel (2015, p. 411) states, effectively erases 'the public voice of individuals whose bodies and names are visibly marked by […] race as a category of difference?' It is noteworthy that the first-person narrator takes up the interrogative modus that has been introduced when the child asks the 'deadly question': The story ends with a set of questions that are directed at Migros. The protagonist asks the company about their choice to take a brown teddy bear, instead of a dirty one; he asks how he should explain the racist punch line to a Black child; and, finally he questions the store's decision to use racism as a means of advertising. Lobe's questions set people of colour's experiences of racism in relation to the enterprise that causes and upholds racism in the first place. If the advertisement forces a hostile white gaze upon the Black other, then directing questions at Migros, which initiated it, is a way of returning the racialising gaze. This is an important mode of Black resistance that bell hooks (2015, p. 2) calls 'looking back.' Hooks explains how controlling images have been 'central to the maintenance of any system of racial domination.' In this vein, commodity racism delineates not only how white people derive pleasure from objectifying non-white others, but also how such images are used to rule over and dominate non-white others. For Black people, so hooks (ibid., p. 5), this caused 'the pain of learning that we cannot control our images, how we see ourselves.' However, Black people have developed strategies for challenging the white gaze. They have learned to 'interrogate the gaze of the Other but also look back, and at one another, naming what we see' (ibid., p. 116). Questioning the hegemonic gaze is closely linked to the ability to return the gaze. Looking back evolves as a tactic of resistance to the hegemonic control of racist images. As we will see below, the campaign against Migros's advertisement employed both the anti-racist strategy of looking back and that of 'laughing back' (Pétrémont 2015).

Mimicking Whiteness

The history around the detergent advertisement was addressed at the anti-racist comedy festival 'Laugh up, stand up' on 14 November 2015 at Shedhalle in Zurich. At this event, the Geneva-based *Collectif Afro-Swiss* (CAS) and its allies put on a fifteen-minute performance entitled 'A Year Later Show.' It tackled the question of what had happened one year after the anti-racist critique of the advertisement was voiced in the

Swiss public.[3] The moderator opened the show saying 'exactly one year ago, in November 2014, one of the country's major grocery stores, "Grosse Store," was targeted by a group of anti-racists for an advert they considered racist. Though the case went public, the company managed to handle it.'[4] The performance ironically reacts to the widespread ignorance and lack of comprehension that the anti-racist critique of the advertisement was met with. However, as Mélanie-Evely Pétrémont (2015, p. 10), who was also one of the actors in the performance, importantly states: the 'displacement and re-interpretation of the ad cannot only be seen as a *reply*, but also as a *creation* of an alternative space through the use of humour.' In the following, I would like to elaborate on this specific alternative space.

CAS's comedy show was set up as a parody of the failed dialogue between the company and its anti-racist critics. Mister Cleansingman, the general director of 'Grosse Store'—a fake name for the Migros—is virtually the only one speaker in the show. The other guest, Miss Fairworld, the (white) president of the 'Figurative Commission Against Racism' (a parody of the Federal Commission Against Racism and its often reluctant anti-racist politics), speaks very rarely. A third seat in the middle of the roundtable remains empty throughout the performance, which was reserved for anti-racist activists. As the moderator remarks, 'we also invited a group of anti-racists this morning, but they couldn't make it.'[5] Thus, the show's setting mirrors the power relations at play in the media and in society at large. The moderator is completely focused on the general director whose view on the incident gets full stage. He talks about his advertisement's 'highly innovative way of demonstrating the power of white-washing,' and calls the anti-racist activists 'marginal paranoiacs.'[6] The seat reserved for the activists remains empty throughout, not because they had not been invited, but because the terms of the invitation had been impossible to meet. Unlike a declared act of repression ('we do not talk to them!'), the show mimics a neoliberal setting that excludes while pretending to include anti-racist positions.

Both the moderator and general director were played by Black women, Pamela Ohene-Nyako and Mélanie-Evely Pétrémont, respectively. In this way, the performance is not only a parody of the all-too-well-known performances of powerful white men, but it also works with the paradoxical presence of the most visible and the most invisible bodies in public space. As Jovita dos Santos Pinto (2013, p. 185) writes, 'Black women neither have the option not to be affected by images of strangers,

nor can they represent themselves as an integral part of the Swiss population.' In CAS's performance, both actors transgress this liminal position by assuming the position of hegemonic masculinity, which is both characterised by the *heightened visibility* of white men who are given disproportionally more space and attention in the media, politics, science or economics than anyone else and by the *invisibility* of their specific position that is marked as universal and neutral. Black women, on the other hand, are confronted with *low visibility* in the public space, where they are poorly represented, as well as high visibility through the ways that Black femininity is displayed as the radical and '(s)exoticised' Other (Pinto 2013). CAS turns these visual power relations upside down, as two Black women skillfully imitate the habitus of influential white men who love to listen to themselves and are unable to recognise other positions. The tension between the unfamiliar presence of Black women in the public sphere and the familiar omnipresence of white men runs through this short piece, depicting what could be described as a *mimetic* act of resistance.

According to Luce Irigaray, mimesis is a way of subverting a system of representation that does not leave any space for women. Referring to the androcentric regimes of representation, she writes: '[t]o play with mimesis is thus, for a woman, to try to recover the place of her exploitation by discourse, without allowing herself to be simply reduced to it' (Irigaray 1985, p. 76). This allows her to make visible, 'what was supposed to remain invisible: the cover-up of a possible operation of the feminine in language' (ibid., p. 76). In *Speculum*, Irigaray (1985) takes up Sigmund Freud's writing on women. By repeating and re-doubling his words from the (impossible) place of a woman, she is able to shift the meaning and reveal the absurdity of Freud's claim to write on women neutrally from a male perspective within a patriarchal regime of knowledge. In a similar way, by performing white masculinity, the two Black female actors manage to point out the simultaneously privileged and contingent position of white men who dare to decide about the legitimacy of racist violations without taking into account their own involvement in a system of white supremacy. As in Irigaray's (1985, p. 76) description, CAS enters the 'place of their exploitation by discourse,' that is through a public discussion on racism and sexism that takes place without them, thereby making their exclusion visible.

Importantly, the performance not only reclaims the public space, it also sets up a different relation between the public and history.

In the talk show, Mister Cleansingman asks the technician to project an image of his 'prize-winning' advertisement. This is a reference to the prestigious 'Swiss Poster Award,' which the Migros campaign received in 2014, despite the debates about its racist content. However, the image that appears is the '*Savonnerie nationale Genève*' (Geneva National Soap Works) poster from around 1900 that shows a Black man whose body is being washed by a group of white people dressed in Swiss folklore attire. Both his hands and arms are white, as Black ink drips from his arms and lands in a puddle on the ground. Upon seeing the image, the moderator is flustered and shouts at the technician: 'I said 2014, not 1914!' Immediately, the historical advertisement is replaced by the recent Migros ad. The moderator humbly apologises to Mister Cleansingman: 'Sorry about that!'

This scene delineates the repression of Switzerland's colonial history. It demonstrates the active removal of historical remnants of colonialism, which makes it possible to claim 'Switzerland had nothing to do with colonialism' (Purtschert 2011, pp. 173–176 and 199–202). Again, the performance shows 'what was supposed to remain invisible,' (Irigaray 1985, p. 76) the cover-up of a different relationship between history and memory. In the discussion following their performance, Pamela Ohene-Nyako explains that the image of the 'Savonerie de Genève' clearly locates racism *within* Switzerland. This stands in contradiction to 'typically Swiss reactions' to racism like, 'No, not here. Somewhere else, but you guys have been paranoiacs. Even if we are maybe guilty about something, it's always worse elsewhere.'[7] In the performance, the 'not here,' which this strategy of refusal evokes, is revealed as the active repression of coloniality and its traces. By mimicking the labour of 'forgetting the colonial past,' CAS occupies the space of colonial amnesia and makes the collective process of disremembering visible.

Finally, as Mélanie-Evely Pétrémont (2015) writes, Collectif Afro-Swiss's piece delineates what happens 'when the Other laughs back.' The performance exposes the rituals and gestures of white masculinity and mocks the rituals of power that are used to silence critical Black and anti-racist voices. This kind of laughing entails, as Mikhail Bakhtin (1984, p. 92) elaborates on in his analysis of a different historical period, the 'defeat of power, of earthly kings, of the earthly upper classes, of all that oppresses and restricts.' Similar to looking back, laughing back constitutes a powerful strategy of critique for people who have no choice but to face and confront oppression.

Second Exemplary Case: Decolonising the Public Sphere

On 22 May 2014, two Social Democrats, Halua Pinto de Magalhães and Fuat Köçer, presented the City Parliament of Bern with a postulate ['*Postulat*'] entitled '*Die KulturEvolution* [sic] *der Institutionen*' (The Cultural Evolution of the Institutions). Among other things, it demanded that the city actively deal with the postcolonial histories of its own institutions. It points out the paradoxical stance of a city that on the one hand initiates a comprehensive integration plan, while, on the other hand, does not intervene when some of its own institutions actively use discriminating names and symbols. Consequently, the proclamation demands that 'integration' not only focus on the 'cultures of the others,' but that it also includes the native population.[8]

The proclamation further demands that the migrant population be sufficiently represented among the city's personnel and called for a 'postcolonial reworking' of the city's history. The proclamation expressly names the '*Mohrenzunft*' (Guild of the Moors) as a point of historical contention. Dating back to the fourteenth century, the guild is part of the '*Burgergemeinde*,' a political body within the city to which only certain elite individuals could belong and most of whom were part of the old ruling families of the City of Bern. The guild's seat located in the centre of the old city is adorned with an emblem consisting of a racialised face of a Black man. Pinto and Köçer demand that the city finds a solution for such racist symbols and representations in the public space, either by adapting them to the current zeitgeist or perhaps even removing them (2014).

Within Switzerland's regime of racelessness, the proclamation can be read as an 'anti-amnesiac intervention.' Theo Goldberg (2006, p. 337) describes colonial amnesia as strategies of forgetting that characterise how former colonial powers deal with their past. Amnesia depicts the 'now deafening silence in Europe concerning its colonial legacy.' It also decouples the colonial past from current migration movements. As Stuart Hall shows in regard to Great Britain, migrant patterns often follow the paths forged through colonial relations or transatlantic slavery. However, upon reaching British soil, the relations of dependency and domination had been reconfigured in 'the wake of decolonisation, and masked by a *collective amnesia* about, and systematic disavowal of, "empire"' (Hall 2000, p. 218). The repression of the colonial past opens up what Fatima El-Tayeb (2011, p. xxv) calls the 'dialectic of memory

and amnesia, in the shape of an easily activated archive of racial images whose presence is steadfastly denied.' The case of the Bern 'moor' is exemplarily of how this dialectic works. Even though the figure is present in public space, neither the city authorities nor the majority of the city's inhabitants regard it as a remnant of colonial times. Pinto and Köçer's proclamation challenges this mutually shared and institutionally embedded 'active process of "forgetting"' (ibid., p. xxiv). Their proclamation also serves as a reminder that the society is built on intimate relations with the very same people that its integration programs treat as strangers.

Pinto and Köçer's proclamation elicited very strong reactions in Bern and beyond. It made the press all over German-speaking Switzerland, including tabloids and National Radio and TV shows. In the first feature-length coverage in the local newspaper *Der Bund*, the headlines stated 'academics fear a new iconoclasm.'[9] In the article, several historians claimed that the image of the moor could not be racist, because the guild dates back to the fourteenth century and, therefore, to a time preceding colonialism.[10]

However, not all academics repudiated Pinto and Köçer's proclamation. A further article included voices (along with this author's), which supported their view from a different academic standpoint.[11] Later on, historian Bernhard C. Schär looked more closely at the case. He doubted whether the figure of the Black person impersonates a peaceful vision of a stranger, as some claimed, and proposed that it dates back to the *Reconquista* era. According to Schär, the heraldic figure of the moor was invented in the thirteenth century and was widely circulated in Europe and adopted by numerous societies, including Swiss municipalities. The image depicts heads of Muslims decapitated by Christian knights. Thus, Schär (2014) states, "historically speaking, the moor as a heraldic figure is a form of Christian humiliation of Islam." Furthermore, the historian discovered that the guild of the moor last changed its emblem in 1891, a time when the standard Swiss German lexicon entry for 'Mohr' (moor) was 'a human being of dark colour or dirty looking' and 'someone who is morally raw and rude' (ibid.). Schär recalls that the Swiss scientists from that era, such as Carl Vogt or Paul and Fritz Sarasin, composed standard works on race that established links between 'primitive races' and apes (ibid.). Against this backdrop, Schär concludes that the guild's emblem entails features attributed to so-called 'primitive' humans in that era and represents a racist image of Africans established in the late nineteenth century. Finally, Schär brings up that the guild was involved

in the transatlantic slave trade during 1726 and 1732, and had invested what amounts to about 40 million Swiss francs today in the South Sea Company. Like Pinto and Köçer's proclamation, Schär's historical research counters the process of erasing the colonial past. It reveals the guild's intimate ties to the crimes of slavery and, moreover, the need to historically contextualise the figure of the moor—located in the heart of the City of Bern—in the late nineteenth century during the height of race research.

'No Mohr Racism'

The anti-racist activities that question the images of the moor in Bern challenge colonial amnesia in different ways. The proclamation addresses the deep-seated contradiction at the core of Swiss society, namely that colonial remainders are everywhere while colonial history remains largely dis-articulated. Pinto and Köçer's counter this amnesia by stating the presence of the colonial formation (be it in the form of racist images or the absence of people of colour in relevant positions in politics and administration) within contemporary Switzerland and thus also by calling upon white majority to take the due accountability for covering up such racist formations. Their strategy is backed by Schär's historical research that traces the genealogy of these colonial remainders and their detailed entanglement during several stages of the colonial past.

In a conversation with the author, Halua Pinto de Magalhães states that he never questioned the fact that the figure was racist or that it was necessary to take action. He mentioned that 'for someone who has experienced racist discrimination, it is obvious that one has to act if there is something like [the figure of the moor] in the public space and is not discussed.'[12] Nonetheless, Pinto de Magalhães's right to openly critique these figures was put into question time and time again. This shows how the (white) refusal to engage with the common colonial entanglements affects the living conditions of people of colour. As Michel (2015, p. 422) puts it, 'politics of postcoloniality, which privileges the denial of the past and present racism in Switzerland […] leaves hardly any room for the participation of the individuals who are the most readily exposed to racism.' Such a politics of denial comes into play when (white) city representatives, or academics, deny the relevance of the figure of the moor for the present, or argue that it had a 'more neutral' meaning in the past. In doing so, they construct a history of anti-entanglement that

undermines attempts to make the hidden relations between past colonial structures and today's postcolonial regimes visible. For Pinto de Magalhães, the uneven grounds on which these debates are conducted raise the crucial question of 'who can speak in the public space?' He concludes by stating the 'democratisation of the public space means that marginalised positions can be articulated as well.'[13]

Such a space was created at the Kanak Tribunal mentioned at the beginning. Its name combines the institution of the tribunal, which is usually set up as a special court often related to human rights violations, such as war crimes. The term '*Kanak*' originally refers to the Hawaiian word kanaka, which means human being. From the 1960s on, it was used in Germany as a swearword for people who did not look white, especially for the migrant workers from Southern Europe. Young migrants began to appropriate the term in the 1990s, signifying a 'rupture with the discourse on the children of "guest workers"' (Kömürcü and Onur 2011, p. 643). It gained currency through the activities of '*Kanak Attak*,' a German anti-racist network that was particularly active in the late 1990s.[14] The Bern Kanak Tribunal applies the anti-racist appropriation of the term *Kanak* and combines it with the more recognised term of the tribunal. It creates a quasi-legal space in which the '*Kanaks*' set their own conditions for discourse.

The Kanak Tribunal can be seen as what Faranak Miraftab (2004, p. 1) calls an 'invented space,' which she differentiates from an 'invited space' of citizenship. While invited spaces are legitimised by governmental and other hegemonic bodies, invented spaces 'directly confront the authorities and the status quo' (ibid., p. 1). Even though the term 'invited space' sounds rather euphemistic, in view of the hard political and media work that anti-racist work requires, it also can be applied to Pinto and Köçer's proclamation and to Schär's article in the local newspaper. They were both successful in their own ways. The proclamation was deemed of considerable importance and will receive further treatment. Because of the debate, the guild of the moor mounted a plaque on its building stating that the heraldic figure refers to Saint Maurice or the Holy King Balthasar and thus rewrites the history of a harmonious precolonial past. However, it also declares that '[t]he image of the moor in the crest and coat of arms reflects contemporary ideas of Black men (and is hence colo[u]red by prejudice).'[15] This seems to have been a direct response to the anti-racist critique. However, these reactions also delineate the spatial and temporal limitations that are inherent to most 'invited

spaces': it will take a long time until Pinto and Köçer's proclamation receives further treatment. And the guild of the moor only took a very modest step towards decolonising its own institution.

As Miraftab (2004, p. 4) writes, 'invented spaces' are so important because they create 'new spaces of citizenship practice.' This is evident in the example of the Kanak Tribunal. The flyers announcing the event carry the slogan 'No Mohr Racism!' (a double wordplay on 'no more racism' and on the claim that the guild's references to the 'moor' are racist) and state that Swiss courts would only recognise racism if it violates Article 261, the so-called 'anti-racism article' of the Swiss Criminal Code. As recent research has shown, racism is generally narrowly defined in Swiss courts (Naguib 2016). Court decisions also mirror the general refusal to recognise racism as a structural problem. Noémi Michel (2015, p. 422) writes that in Switzerland, 'racism is reduced to individual intentions and refers to explicitly violent verbal or physical acts that are disconnected from broader structures and histories.' The Kanak Tribunal emerges as a space, which opposes such politics of colonial amnesia. After the opening words of the historian Jovita dos Santos Pinto at the Kanak Tribunal, the first chairperson, lawyer Tarek Naguib, states: 'the main topic of our debate today is the question of who can and ought to talk when, what and where about racism. Who is heard and who is not, and whose voices are even silenced.'[16] The Tribunal creates a public space where the conditions of speaking in the public space are questioned and transformed. The call for the Kanak Tribunal—"That's why we convene our own court"[17]—can be read as an expression of the 'collective hunger to come to voice,' as Grada Kilomba (2013, p. 10) aptly calls it.

Conclusion: Disclosing Public Racism, Reclaiming Public Space

The activities countering the public display of racist images uncover how everyday racism (Essed 2008) plays out in the public spaces in Switzerland, and how this effectively restricts the movements of people, affects their well being and their sense of belonging. These insights further indicate radically unequal democratic conditions in Switzerland. Non-white inhabitants of Switzerland are only seldom represented in political bodies and the national imaginary. Additionally, as the resistance to both the advertisement for Total detergent and the figure of the moor in Bern show, they are subject to racist representations that are not

recognised as problematic by the majority of society, academia and the media. A significant effect of racialisation is that the fundamental democratic right to make use of the public sphere is enacted under radically uneven conditions. This insight strongly resonates with feminist analyses of public spaces as zones of fear and unsafety for women (Condon et al. 2007, pp. 101–128). In public, women are also often exposed to sexist images and highly problematic gender norms, which strongly affect their sense of freedom and belonging (Scheidegger 2016). A first overdue conclusion drawn from this parallel would be a critique of how the public sphere is constructed according to different and intersecting regimes of power. This leads to the following questions: how does race, class, gender, sexuality, religion, age or dis-/ability inform the ways in which bodies can or cannot move, thrive and engage in the public sphere? How can we make the restrictions and privileges that determine our access to public space a topic in discussions of political participation in a broader sense, and in what way does this change our very understanding of democracy?

A second conclusion can be drawn from the fact that these anti-racist activities open up a different perception of Switzerland, as they contest the whiteness of the nation while pointing out the crucial role that historical and actual manifestations of race play in the formation of the nation. This perspective erodes the very foundation of the notion of Switzerland as a place untouched by colonialism and racial regimes. It demands reframing Swiss history through acknowledging that migration movements have played a crucial role, and that race has been a constitutive (albeit ever-changing) element in the formation of Swiss society—a point that has not only been neglected in Swiss history in general, is but also rarely addressed in studies of the migration history in Switzerland.

Thirdly, the insights gained by the two movements towards resistance discussed here provide an understanding of democracy based on a decolonisation of the public sphere. This is reminiscent of Judith Butler's (2000, p. 11) notion of a polity that is based on an openness towards the voices of the excluded: 'Democratic polities are constituted through exclusions that return to haunt the polities predicated upon their absence. That haunting becomes politically effective precisely in so far as the return of the excluded forces an expansion and rearticulation of the basic premises of democracy itself.' Such a rearticulation takes place when CAS takes to the stage and lays bare the racist power structure of the public discussion, or when the Kanak Tribunal opens up a

space for an otherwise publicly silenced debate about structural racism to take place. Such alternative public spaces entail a thorough critique of the democratic conditions in Switzerland. They allow public space to be reformulated as a common space that is no longer centred on whiteness or, even more so, a common space that makes the critique of whiteness a condition for democracy. This not only enables the emergence of striking visions of a politics of participation that goes beyond racial divisions, but it also makes it possible for the history of Switzerland to no longer be conceived as white, which it never was in the first place.

Notes

1. Jovita dos Santos Pinto. Unpublished opening statement of the Kanak Tribunal in Bern, 2016. All translations from German are the author's.
2. Ohene-Nyako, Pamela et al. "Lettre ouverte à Migros," 28 October, 2014.
3. The performance was developed and performed by Sophie Pagliai, Mischa Piraud, Noémi Michel, Pamela Ohene-Nyako, and Mélanie-Evely Pétrémont.
4. CAS (Collectif Afro-Swiss), video of the performance at the anti-racist comedy festival 'Laugh up, Stand up,' Shedhalle Zurich, 14 November 2015, private collection of Mélanie-Evely Pétrémont.
5. Idem.
6. Idem.
7. Idem.
8. Halua Pinto des Magalhães and Fuat Köçer, "KulturEvolution der Institutionen," Postulate of the Social Democratic Party of Switzerland (SP), *Stadtrat* (City council), Bern, 2014. Accessed 9 March, 2017, https://ris. bern.ch/Geschaeft.aspx?obj_guid=44cb06fb28334b6d8b3e561ca1672cac.
9. Christl, Fabian. "Jetzt geht es dem 'Mohren' an den Kragen." *Der Bund*, 10 May 2014. http://www.derbund.ch/bern/stadt/Jetzt-geht-es-dem-Mohren-an-den-Kragen/story/22437181.
10. Idem.
11. Christl, Fabian. "Unterstützung für das Postulat zum Mohren." *Der Bund*, 14 May 2014. http://www.derbund.ch/bern/kanton/Unterstuetzung-fuer-das-Postulat-zum-Mohren/story/31664709.
12. Halua Pinto de Magalhães in conversation with the author, 26 September 2016.
13. Idem.
14. Kanak Attak, "Manifest," 1998. Accessed 8 March, 2017, http://www. kanak-attak.de/ka/about/manif_eng.html.

15. The plaque was mounted on the guild's building at Kramgasse 12 in Bern in 2017.
16. Tarek Naguib. Unpublished opening statement of the Kanak Tribunal in Bern, 2016.
17. Berner Rassismus Stammtisch, Kanakentribunal. 2016. Flyer for the event of the 25 August 2016 at the PROGR in Bern.

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Barbara Lüthi · Damir Skenderovic
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Editors
Barbara Lüthi
History Department
University of Cologne
Cologne, Germany

Damir Skenderovic
Department of Contemporary History
University of Fribourg
Fribourg, Switzerland

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