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Sheepology: The Postcolonial Politics of Raceless Racism in Switzerland

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Introduction: Swiss Sheep, European Racelessness

Despite the existence of anti-racist movements since the 1970s in Switzerland, it remains difficult to discuss and denounce racism and its colonial genealogy in the Swiss public sphere. Researchers in the emerging field which addresses 'post-colonial Switzerland' cite, for instance, the famous 'sheep poster' as a striking example of an unsanctioned wide circulation of racial imagery.[1] This poster (Figure 1), which triggered a public controversy, supported a 2007 campaign of the far right-wing Swiss People's Party (SVP) by placing the slogan 'For More Security' under an image of several white sheep kicking a black sheep out of a territory labelled with the national flag. According to some scholars, the majority of Swiss authorities and citizens failed to address the racism at play in such an image, because they shared (and continue to share) an understanding which emphasizes Switzerland's non-possession of formal colonies, neglects the country's multiple entanglements within transnational colonial projects, and thus conceives 'Swiss-ness' as external to (post-)colonial history and racism.[2]

The Swiss context is rarely explored in the broader field of research devoted to post-coloniality in continental Europe. Yet, interestingly, two renowned critical race theorists, David Theo Goldberg and Fatima El-Tayeb, acknowledge the case of the sheep. Both mention the poster in order to illustrate the peculiar form of 'raceless racism' characterizing post-war Western continental Europe.[3] According to Goldberg, the sheep poster exemplifies the ongoing production of implicitly racially coded, spatio-affective borders that construct subjects marked by racial difference as not belonging to or as threats towards European nation-states.[4] In a similar vein, El-Tayeb contends that the poster deploys a 'strategy that relies on a shared iconography that remains unspoken', namely on a broader continent-wide form of invisible racialization.[5]

At the crossroads of studies on postcolonial Switzerland and on raceless Euro-racism, this article addresses the politics of unnameable racism in Switzerland as it relates to and also differs from the broader European context. I ask the following questions: What hegemonic regime conditions Swiss public discussions on racism? Who can expose, denounce, combat racism, and how? I use the sheep poster as an interesting case to explore the contemporary public production of a raceless racism. I situate the poster in a broader historical and political context through the lens of postcolonial discourse analysis.

The first section deploys the tools of a postcolonial genealogy and analyses the under-articulated history of colonial racialized discourses conveyed by the poster. The second and third sections rely on discourse analysis[6] of the broad controversy that occurred around the poster between July and December 2007. This controversy

Figure 1. Street view of the Swiss People's Party (SVP) 'sheep' campaign of 2007
Source: Patricia Purtschert.

pitted demands for the ban or official condemnation of the campaign due to its racism or exclusionary content against discourses of support affirming that the poster had 'nothing to do with race'. Drawing on the analysis of a corpus of public claims expressed by various actors against or in defence of the poster during the controversy, I show that the sheep poster controversy consisted of a struggle between three antagonistic articulations of 'Swissness' and 'difference': an anti-racist discourse, an anti-exclusionary discourse, and a defensive discourse. I furthermore demonstrate that this struggle reasserted and renewed a regime of raceless racism.

While postcolonial studies on Switzerland remain mainly historical, my account connects the past with the present. The sheep poster's history and controversy illustrate the Swiss version of what I call the 'politics of postcoloniality'—namely the constant negotiation of the weight of the racialized colonial past in the present. As I wish to show, the Swiss politics of postcoloniality privilege the conviction of the absence of a colonial past. Such a denial facilitates the production of raceless racism and hinders the public voice of individuals whose bodies and names are visibly marked by the long history of the construction of race as a category of difference.

Echoes of Colonial Racism

Between July and December 2007, the sheep poster crystallized one of the longest and most important controversies around public representation and politicization

of 'difference' and 'Swissness'. Switzerland found itself in the spotlight of international media and under scrutiny of human rights observers. In a letter addressed to the Swiss federal government, the U.N. Special Rapporteur on contemporary forms of discrimination evoked former controversial campaigns of the SVP and called for the banning of the poster that he deemed contributed to a 'racist dynamic'.[7] Many other interventions denounced the racism of the poster, yet only a few referred to Switzerland's colonial past. At that time, the small number of studies tackling Switzerland's entanglements with slavery and colonialism remained confined to academic discussions, and mainly focused on economic dimensions.[8]

It is only recently that Switzerland has been examined in postcolonial investigations exploring 'how colonial and postcolonial constellations are currently negotiated, reproduced, and re-encoded, and how these are related to contemporary forms of racism'.[9] Contributing to this emerging academic engagement, this section provides a historicized reading of the discursive—that is the visual, textual, and affective—elements articulated by the SVP campaign. The poster reactivates three racialized discourses: commodity racism, the spectacle of the 'other' and obsession with purity. These discourses emerged and were stabilized by multiple forms and levels of entanglement between Swiss actors and institutions and transnational colonial projects of domination.[10]

The poster displays four sheep drawn in a cartoonish style starkly differentiated by means of the white/black chromatic dichotomy. It deploys a simplistic and childish mode of address. These semiotics echo the visual and interpellating codes of 'commodity racism'—a form of racism channelled through colonial commodities and aimed at mass consumption in the increasingly globalized markets.[11] From the late nineteenth century onward, the Swiss market opened itself to goods produced in colonial empires and their metropoles, and Swiss firms appropriated codes of commodity racism. Swiss companies renewed these codes by diffusing them through their own products and advertisements targeting the emerging bourgeois household economy. Thus commodity racism became a privileged site of articulation where discourses on the 'Swiss nation' and on 'race' intersected.[12] Many goods were advertised through animal characters, simple graphic language, and derived products for children. In this context, the sheep poster's mode of address recalls the childish figures that constituted privileged vessels of euphemized racial meanings;[13] its black/white dichotomy recalls the fusion of chromatic and phenotypic codes that were common within the semiotics of commodity racism.[14] The whiteness of the fur of the 'Swiss' sheep echoes the whiteness of the soap and other washing products associated with ideas of hygiene, purity, and modernity, and the 'white' European subject.[15] The blackness of the sheep's expelled fur resonates with dirtiness, evilness, and the 'black', uncivilized, non-European subject.[16]

The poster displays a sharp spatial separation. The three white sheep belong to the space contained within the Swiss flag. The black sheep is being expelled to the outside of this Swiss space, beyond the border of the flag. This spatial set-up resonates with practices and discourses of another important articulatory site of racial and national discourses called the '(s)exotic spectacle of the other', according to dos Santos Pinto.[17] Recent studies explore how, from the late nineteenth century

on, the Swiss people 'discovered' and consumed the 'exotic other' through numerous popular 'ethnic shows' and exhibits of 'savages' that took place in zoos, fairs, and exhibitions.[18] In 1896, for instance, the Swiss national exhibition of Geneva comprises a so-called 'Negro village' in front of a miniature 'Swiss village'; the advertisement of the former village announced a 'great attraction' with the title 'Black continent, Muslim and fetishist celebrations'.[19] Such a spatio-discursive setting contributed to the formation and stabilization of a racially objectifying gaze amongst the viewers. It traced a rigid border between the bodies and rites associated with racial difference against those associated with the 'Swiss nation'. Such a bordering consolidated the idea that Switzerland, despite its plurality of languages and religions, consists of a racially *homogeneous* nation aligned with white Europeanness. Read against the backdrop of the spectacle of the other (that persists until today[20]), the border in the sheep poster reactivates the sharp separation between the racially homogeneous Swiss community and the outside—the space of racial difference.

Finally, the poster references colonial discourses of fear and purity. The slogan *Sicherheit schaffen* (for more security) supports a law aiming to control and eliminate 'criminals' associated with the figure of the black sheep from the national space (called the 'Swiss home' within the SVP logo).[21] A very similar affective logic nurtured what Véronique Mottier calls, following Zygmunt Bauman, the Swiss version of the 'quest for order', namely the intensified 'concern with boundary-drawing and boundary-maintenance as mechanisms for reducing ambivalence and constructing the social and political order' that informed the emergence of modern nation-states.[22] In the peculiar Swiss context, this quest translated into the search for an internal balance between linguistic and religious differences and led to the institutionalization of federalism, neutrality, and direct democracy. Up to now, these three institutions have been widely considered to form the 'pillars' of Switzerland's political culture and identity. They are referred to as key ingredients of the Swiss *Sonderfall*, the common understanding of post-war Switzerland as 'an exceptional country: more prosperous, more harmonious, more democratic, more self-reliant, more able to solve its problems and more moral that other States'.[23] However, as Mottier emphasizes, the quest for order also implies the rigorous identification and elimination of 'bad seeds' from within. In the first half of the twentieth century, such an obsession with purity was sustained by eugenicist discourses and practices elaborated by internationally renowned Swiss scientists. Such figures included August Forel, who promoted forced sterilization of criminals, prostitutes, alcoholics, immoral persons, gypsies, and inferior races considered as 'pathogen agents',[24] or Otto Schlaginhaufen, who claimed that the Swiss race of the *Homo alpinus helveticus* was too contaminated by foreign races.[25]

When placed within the epistemic and cultural history of race and coloniality, the SVP poster strongly resonates with a plethora of discourses that circulated at various levels and in different spaces of Switzerland, but ultimately converged in their task of aligning the 'Swiss' subject with 'white Europeanness' and in producing an objectified notion of racial difference. As a state, Switzerland neither possessed formal colonies nor claimed sovereign rights over colonial subjects. As a national community, however, it drew upon images of 'blackness' or

'Africanness' onto which the Swiss could project attributes they did not wish to be identified with. Discourses of racial difference stabilized the outside of an imagined community formed by modern, proper, sophisticated, and economically advanced subjects. Racialized discourses allowed the Swiss citizens to identify with the white subject of the European imperial space. During the age of European colonialism, such discourses had racist exclusionary effects. They informed refusals of citizenship,[26] forced sterilization, children's removal, and administrative detentions;[27] they translated into discourses of 'over-foreignisation' in the politics of nationality, immigration, and integration.[28] Altogether, these racialized discourses and practices imposed dehumanizing experiences on subjects marked by racial difference who lived in the Swiss territory, as recalled in rare testimonies.[29] Do the echoes of colonial racism conveyed by the sheep poster actualize contemporary forms of racism? The following two sections demonstrate that the competing discursive articulations deployed around the poster informed a struggle over the name-ability of racism, and, consequently, over the potential to combat the hauntings of the colonial and racist past.

Naming Racism: The 'Afro-Swiss' Candidates' Contestation

Immediately after having been showcased to the media, the sheep poster became the target of interventions accusing the campaign of channelling a racist message and harming racialized minorities in Switzerland. These interventions were expressed through various channels: civil society responded with press manifestoes, letters, graffiti, and counter-images. Local and national authorities expressed their opposition through parliamentary motions, debates, and official statements. Various actors articulated such critiques: anti-racist and human rights associations, racial minority collectives, individual citizens, artists, and far left-wing political parties. All these interventions demanded that the authorities forbid or officially condemn the campaign.[30] In what follows, I focus on the challenge to the poster posed by 'those representing the unrepresentable in the European model',[31] namely, a group of candidates for the Swiss Parliament who, in September 2007, assembled under the name 'multiparty candidates of African descent'.[32]

The intervention of the seven candidates of 'African descent' articulated a visual performance with a verbal declaration within the frame of a press conference. By posing en bloc in front of the Swiss Federal Council (Figure 2), the candidates displayed a single collective subject formed by different political affiliations and cantonal origins[33] but united by 'blackness'. During their press conference, they declared the following:

> Switzerland is a place of peace and tolerance. Switzerland is a place of concord and mutual respect. Yet some forces in *our country* privilege discord and propagate fear instead of trust and assurance. We assembled today, dear media representatives, in order *to remove the visceral fear from you*. We are presenting ourselves to you and you will state that *we are humans of flesh and blood with singular viewpoints and ambitions*. About 60,000 people with an African background live in Switzerland. They come from various cultures and countries. *We represent a part of this composite population* composed of multiple layers.[34]

Figure 2. The candidates of 'African descent' pose in front of the Swiss National Assembly
Source: KEYSTONE/Peter Klaunzer.

The candidates sought to expose and displace the poster's racist violence. They juxtaposed the childish and cartoonish address of the poster with the gravitas of solemnly posed bodies signifying 'humans of flesh and blood'. By mobilizing the body as a medium, 'as a means of self-expression and as a carrier of a message to spectators',[35] they disrupted the euphemizing logics of the cartoon graphics and the black/white chromatism. They invited viewers to read the black sheep as the signifier of bodily markers categorized by racialized difference. Their visual performance echoed numerous other interventions that verbally associated the black sheep with a specific position of racial difference. Further, the performance shed light on a national context already heavily marked by racism. For instance, one candidate declared that the 'poster stigmatises one race, one colour', while another claimed that her childhood in Switzerland was 'harder than for others since she was black'.[36]

The candidates' intervention sought to disrupt the logic of spatial segregation and objectification of racial difference at play in the poster. On the verbal/textual level, it elaborated a semantic chain consolidating a relation of inclusion between blackness and Swissness. The candidates strategically utilized composed names: they called themselves 'Swiss of African descent', 'Afro-Swiss', or 'Blacks of Switzerland'. They constructed a chain of virtuous associations: Switzerland was articulated in a series of positive values—'peace', 'tolerance', 'mutual respect', and 'concord'. Switzerland was also reclaimed by means of the collective first person pronoun, as in the expression 'our country'. This 'we' was at once linked to a peculiar subject position, as signified by the terms 'African descent'

or 'part of the population', and to the idea of public and political representation, as signified by the expressions: 'we present ourselves', 'we gathered', and 'we represent'. The visual performance further amplified this verbal inclusion, as the candidates associated their bodies with the collective body of Switzerland that the building of the National Assembly symbolizes. By anchoring both their names and their bodies at the heart of the Swiss space, they not only aimed to re-inscribe blackness within but also as standing for Switzerland. By seeking to remove the prevailing fear attached to their public presence, by detaching blackness from the stereotype of criminality, the candidates aimed to reconnect their position within a relationship of trust. As they explicated 'we want to show that there are numerous Afro-Swiss that are well integrated and who want to contribute to the political life of Switzerland'.[37]

The candidates' intervention also troubled the prevailing understanding of Switzerland's 'exceptional' relation to difference. As stated above, dominant narratives emphasize how the institutional pillars of neutrality, federalism and direct democracy greatly foster a 'national integration which allow[s] for the expression of cultural "difference"'.[38] Yet, as Matteo Gianni remarks, the differences deemed worthy of accommodation under these pillars are juxtaposed with cantonal and linguistic territories.[39] In this context, the candidates' gathering exposed the implicit whiteness informing the differences worthy of recognition under the Swiss regime. When they associated their bodies and names marked by blackness with Swiss exceptionalism (signified with the notions of 'concord' and 'mutual respect') and when they declared 'we are Swiss because we are different',[40] the candidates re-signified the *Sonderfall* in a way that allows the inclusion of racialized difference, and, consequently, destabilizes hegemonic conceptions of a racially homogeneous 'Swissness'.

In sum, the candidates' intervention articulated visual, verbal/textual, and affective elements that contest not only the poster, but also the broader racialized structure of the Swiss public sphere. Their public contestations explicitly verbalized and visualized racial references. The candidates named and exposed their subject position marked by racial difference. They narrated the racism that they encountered by comparing the poster's effect with other specific histories of racism experienced in Switzerland. Their self-enunciation pursued a strategy of re-appropriation of their specific position. The candidates sought to transform a position objectified by race and racism into a position from which they could act and speak publicly to represent Switzerland. They tried to forge a discursive and visual terrain that enables the expression of their 'singular viewpoints and ambitions'.[41] Following their intervention, such a terrain can only exist at the expense of the prevailing regime of racelessness. Indeed, by qualifying their racial difference as an enriching source for the renewal of the *Sonderfall*, the candidates subverted one important dimension of any raceless regime: the 'internalist narrative' that constructs the racially not European (thus not Swiss) as external or exotic subjects.[42] Yet, as they never referred to the history of colonialism in Switzerland, the candidates did not counter another important dimension of racelessness: colonial amnesia, the 'deafening silence in Europe concerning its colonial legacy'.[43]

To put it in other words, the Afro-Swiss candidates challenged the hegemony of racesslessness in Switzerland by means of a counter-hegemonic discourse.

According to David Howarth, 'hegemony is achieved if and when one political project or force determines the rules and meanings in a particular social formation'.[44] Jacob Torfing proposes differentiating between 'hegemony'—what is achieved—and 'hegemonic practices', namely, 'attempts to dis- and rearticulate social elements in and through antagonistic struggles in order to become hegemonic'.[45] The candidates' intervention illustrates the many articulations that were deployed around the poster by individual and collective subjects who self-identified as bearers of racial difference. All these articulations sought to hegemonize alternative verbal/textual, visual, and affective articulations around 'Swissness', 'whiteness', 'blackness', and 'difference' in order to transform the ways racial difference can be represented, and racism can be spoken about in the Swiss public sphere. They constituted a discourse that I qualify as 'anti-racist' and which never became hegemonic. In my analysis, this discourse was silenced as the result of power dynamics within the controversy.[46]

Racism Unnamed: A Paradoxical Discursive Alliance

Throughout the summer and autumn of 2007, the sheep poster was contested by more than just the anti-racist discourse. Civic associations, left- and right-wing political parties, citizens' collectives, and members of the federal, cantonal, and municipal governments formed a large coalition which accused the poster of performing an 'exclusion' that both harmed foreigners and compromised the Swiss tradition of openness. In contrast to the anti-racist interventions, this line of contestation did not call for the banning or firm condemnation of the poster. Counter-posters, manifestos, press releases, official statements, parliamentary motions, and various other claims demanded the authorities to reaffirm a conception of Swissness that would oppose the image of the white sheep that exclude others.

An example of this line of contestation is the motion, 'Geneva is against exclusion' elaborated by a group of right-wing representatives[47] who called for the reaffirmation of the following principles:

> First we affirm that Geneva should condemn any politics of exclusion. Second, […] we recall that throughout its history, Geneva has been constructed and developed *thanks to the contribution of foreigners*, and especially, four centuries ago, *thanks to the contribution of protestant migrants persecuted by the French king*. Third, we consider that any person who desires to respect the law and integrate in our city should find their place, not in virtue of protective measures, but simply in virtue of what they brings to the community. Geneva is happy to welcome those who use their genie for the profit of the community, Geneva is happy with *this diversity of contributions*.[48]

Adopted by the majority of the local parliament (including left-wing representatives), the motion was translated by the local government into the campaign *vivre–ensemble* ('living together'), namely into two posters (Figure 3). The first displays 23 sheep, symbolizing Switzerland's 23 cantons. The sheep have various forms, multicoloured furs and 'foreign'-sounding names. On the other poster, a white sheep stands alone in the middle of an empty space.

Geneva's campaign illustrates a set of articulations that became hegemonic during the controversy. Indeed, a large number of citizens and associations,
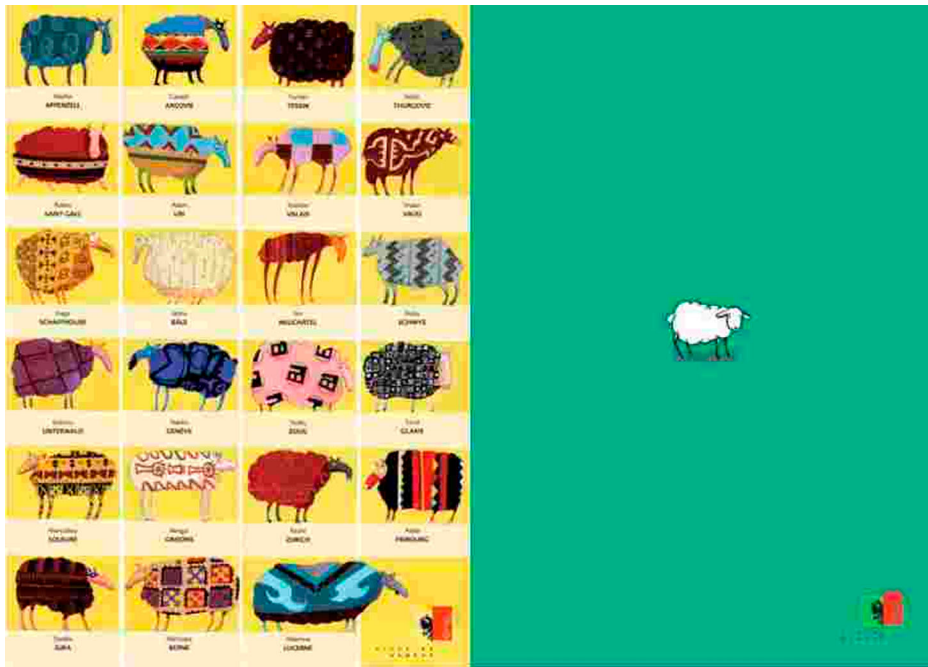
Figure 3. 'Vivre-ensemble' – Poster campaign by the City of Geneva, artists: Albertine and Wazem.

important figures in the federal government (for instance, the President) as well as several parliamentary resolutions and local official counter-campaigns articulated anti-exclusionary claims against the sheep poster.[49]

However, anti-exclusionary contestations shared their hegemonic status with the SVP's defence. The defensive stance also achieved hegemony, as all the legal complaints against the poster were dismissed, and the majority of the authorities did not officially react to the campaign. The following parliamentary intervention of one SVP representative from canton Vaud exemplifies the verbal/textual dimension of this defensive line:

> Opponents to SVP, you do *confound a saying with so-called racism*! […] Your hate towards the SVP and its black sheep blinds you and is so extreme that we should call for the interdiction of the use of the word 'black' from our French language. Recently I was at the post office and the officer was asking the client standing before me to sign a paper with a black pen, because this would be better than blue. She blushed once she realized that the man was black. *Was she racist?* […] A vine grower won't be able to name his wine *Pinot noir* and if someone drinks too much, it will be forbidden to say that this person is *noir* [black]… *Is this racism?* No, all these images do not constitute racism. But *you are exerting racism* towards the SVP when you declare that 25% of the population that voted for this party is racist.[50]

As the SVP faced numerous counter-posters, as well as subversion and destruction of the sheep posters, it also re-invested the visual landscape. For instance, the party published the video *Himmel und Hölle* (Heaven and Hell) on its Internet platform. The video asked the Swiss voters to choose between 'Heaven', namely

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images of rural landscapes and white people, and 'Hell', images of urban landscapes and people marked by racial difference.[51]

The anti-exclusionary contestations and SVP's defence opposed each other. However, the two groups (unintentionally) worked together in blocking, inverting, or blurring the meanings and articulations expressed by the anti-racist contestations. Both discourses interact on the verbal/textual level by causing the issue of racism in the sheep poster to evaporate. On the one hand, the SVP tries to rearticulate the 'black sheep' with the field of language. In the excerpt above, the SVP representative associates the figure with a 'saying', and insists on the chromatic connotation of the adjective 'black'. These articulations stage the anti-racists' racialized interpretation as false and excessive. The SVP seeks to invert the cause of racism: those who pronounce explicit racial references are the ones who cause racism, the ones who 'provoke' and 'exert hate' against the SVP and its supporters. In order to negate the sheep poster's association with racism, the SVP's defence draws upon the prevailing regime of racelessness marked by the taboo of explicit verbal reference to race. On the other hand, without denying the racism of the poster, the Geneva's motion diverts the controversy towards 'exclusion' and the denial of foreigners' contributions. Moreover, it proposes an evasive interpretation of the figure of the sheep, affirming, for instance, that '*each* person can identify with the image of the black sheep'.[52]

The verbal and textual articulations of the SVP and the Geneva's motion work together in reproducing a regime of verbal/textual racial evasiveness which blocks anti-racists' attempts to explicitly name the SVP poster's racist violence. Furthermore, by inverting or evacuating the racialized reading of the image, these two sets of articulations blur the public intelligibility of the interventions expressed under the name 'African descent' or 'Swiss blacks'. The claims that 'blacks' are the group most exposed to racist violence disappear behind the figures of the 'attacked SVP partisan' or the 'excluded foreigner'. Further compounding the erasure is the fact that this 'excluded foreigner' is implicitly coded as 'white', for instance, in the reference to the French 'protestant migrant persecuted by the king' in the excerpt of the motion above.

The SVP's defence and the Geneva's counter-campaign further interact on the visual level. They trouble and block anti-racists' strategies of visibility and embodiment exemplified by the public posing of the candidates. Contrasting with a raceless verbal defence, the video *Himmel und Hölle* reaffirms an explicitly racial border. On the side of 'Heaven', it associates the Swiss collective body with whiteness—with images of a smiling heterosexual couple, blond women, the SVP leader Christoph Blocher and his wife, and white hands that vote in the context of the *Landsgemeinde* (the 'open-air assembly'). On the side of 'Hell', the video associates the 'threatening foreigners' with 'visible' markers of racial difference—with images of veiled women, black men, and youth dressed with urban clothes. Such images come to explicitly represent the bodies that should be associated with the white and black sheep, respectively. They re-solidify and naturalize a chain of affective and visual codes that connect Swissness with purity and foreignness with racialized difference and threat. Such a logic of racial objectification and spectacularization fixes subjects marked as racially different with what Ahmed would call 'sticky signs' of otherness and fear.[53]

The Geneva's counter-campaign deploys very divergent visual articulations. To the rigid border of the SVP, the counter-poster answers with visual diversity, with numerous sheep in many shapes and colours. This image re-associates 'Swissness' in a desirable relation with 'foreignness'. However, this campaign avoids the direct visualization of real bodies, as it relies on metaphorical images of multicoloured sheep. It therefore testifies to the lack of concern regarding the issue of the public figuration of 'blackness'. This is further confirmed when one considers another set of images 'against exclusion' circulated on the web and largely relayed in the media: two posters produced by the local right-wing *Parti Radical Genevois* (PRD) (Radical Party of Geneva). The first image displays a very 'feminine' and 'sexy' black woman posing in a swimming suit on an 'exotic' beach, accompanied by the slogan 'You want to chase the black sheep? We don't—the Radicals'. The second image stages a black and muscled torso accompanied by the same slogan, but signed by the Women's section of the PRD.[54] The PRD declared that their images were meant to mock the SVP in order to 'advance the Enlightenment'.[55] In sum, in the visual interplay of the SVP's defence and the anti-exclusionary contestation, bodies marked by racialized difference either appear as objects (of fear, desire, or humour) or disappear behind multicolour images of sheep.

The SVP's defence and anti-exclusionary interventions also interact on the affective level as they stabilize a concern for saving a 'white' version of the Swiss *Sonderfall.* Anti-exclusionary interventions express a desire for 'difference': they rearticulate 'Swissness' with notions such as 'openness' or 'diversity of contributions' and with positive images such as the multicolour sheep or the 'sexy black sheep'. These interventions refer to creativity, humour, and moderation. Such articulations hail an affective community that is participatory and plural, but also consensual and moderate with regard to the repertory of public actions. In short, the multicoloured or sexy sheep seeks to reaffirm the Swiss political culture sustained by neutrality, multiculturalism, and consensual processes of discussion. Following a very different orientation, the SVP's interventions use markers of interpellation evoking traditional culture. They refer to open-air assembly, rural landscapes, and the heteronormative nuclear family in the video *Himmel und Hölle*. We have seen that the candidates of 'African descent' refer to the positive value of Swiss exceptionalism (peace, tolerance, mutual respect, and concord) as elements of political and historicized context that must be re-signified in order to include racialized difference. By contrast, the interventions both of anti-exclusionary groups and of the SVP aim to reaffirm and thus *conserve* different versions of the Swiss *Sonderfall.* In both versions, Switzerland emerges as an already existing exceptional subject that needs to be protected. Also in both versions, the historical association of 'Swissness' with 'whiteness' remains unquestioned, if not reasserted.[56]

It is worth recalling with El-Tayeb and Goldberg that the politics of racelessness work through complex interactions between what is seen, said, and read.[57] These interactions actively reproduce a series of lacks: a lack of vocabulary, a lack of historicization, and a lack of contextualization. In this way, these interactions reassert 'a common racial archive while simultaneously rendering inexpressible its workings'.[58] The controversy over the sheep poster powerfully illustrates the active

discursive production of such lacks. The sets of articulations that achieved hegemony during this public debate contributed to making racial references and racism evaporate from the sphere of what can be verbally or textually referenced in an explicit way. In the same move, these hegemonic articulations stabilized a visual regime under which attributes of racial difference could be represented only as attributes of nameless objects of fear or as metonymic vessels for the reassertion of a desire for multicolour diversity or sexualized exoticism. I argue that the controversy reproduced a lack of public voice for those that denounced racist violence with the body and name of racial difference. Throughout the sheep poster controversy, race, and racism did not evaporate from what could be seen or read, but from what could be publicly spoken about and thereby effectively combated. In short, racism has been unnamed in the course of a controversy that had begun because of accusations of racism. Race, however, continues to operate under the sign of the sheep.

Conclusion: Sheepology

This article has argued that the 2007 sheep poster and the ensuing controversy reproduced raceless racism. On the one hand, the controversy enabled the visual and affective continuity of racism. As the anti-racists' calls for interdiction or firm condemnation of the poster were silenced, the controversy resulted in legitimizing the public circulation of the sheep poster, namely of an assemblage of codes rooted in Switzerland's colonialism. On the other hand, the controversy reproduced the verbal/textual unnameability of the continuity of racism. It blurred the public intelligibility, the self-naming, and the self-positioning of subjects marked by racial difference, and in doing so blocked their attempts to denounce the racism of the poster.

Besides exemplifying the complex mechanisms that reproduce racelessness, the controversy also powerfully illustrates racelessness's constant need to renew itself while also facing challenges posed by racialized minorities. Indeed, the sheep poster controversy gave birth to a new set of discursive codes, which I propose to call 'sheepology'. Since 2007, the SVP has capitalized on the success of its initial poster by circulating—and selling—numerous related products involving the sheep, such as teddy bears, ties, and balloons. It has also recycled its sheep in various political campaigns. For instance, one local youth section of the party produced a poster staging a black sheep thrown down a ramp with the Swiss flag and the slogan: 'If you fuck Switzerland, you get out.'[59] The 2016 campaign sustaining the initiative for the 'effective deportation of criminal foreigners' staged almost exactly the same sheep and slogan as the 2007 campaign.[60] Opponents to the SVP have also continued to mobilize counter-images or wordplay evoking the sheep. For instance, the former head of the Federal Commission Against Racism titled his book *Kein Volk von Schaffen* (*Not a People of Sheep*).[61] A youth section of the plural left formation in Geneva took the name *United Black Sheep*, and a famous entrepreneur placed huge posters in his sneaker shops with the slogan 'The sheep vote for the SVP.' During a decade marked by the increasing success of far right-wing populism, and the hardening of the politics of asylum and immigration in Switzerland,

the sheep has become a trendy signifier for race: it allows anyone to evoke issues related to race without explicitly mentioning it.

My concluding remarks focus on two dimensions of sheepology that highlight both how deeply the Swiss case is embedded, and how peculiar it is in the context of postcolonial Europe. I contend that sheepology sheds light on the striking role of capitalist consumerist practices and discourses in the past and present diffusions of racism in Western Europe. The sheep poster echoes commodity racism and the spectacle of the 'other' and serves as reminders that Switzerland was strongly embedded in a transnational web of markets during the colonial period. The poster thus recalls that homogenized consumerist and entertainment cultures facilitated a continent-wide incessant dissemination of race. These cultures hailed Swiss consumers as 'colonial white subjects' similar to any other consumers from Western Europe. Sheepology exemplifies the renewal of the intersections of capitalist and racialized codes. The sheep is cute, funny and sexy. It is easily reproduced via various objects that are affectively invested in by subjects sharing various, if not divergent, political affiliations. Thus, sheepology illustrates the powerful alliance between racelessness and the capitalist commodification of difference.[62] Such an alliance facilitates a contemporary dissemination of race that is far from unique, and has implications beyond the Swiss case.

However, sheepology also testifies to the peculiarities of the Swiss context. I share the recent characterization of Switzerland's postcoloniality as a form of 'colonialism without colonies', namely as a community which has constructed a 'self-perception on the idea of having been a "colonial outsider"' since the beginning of decolonizations and their accompanying moral condemnation of colonialism.[63] Such a self-perception has nurtured discourses of 'exceptionalism', particularly a conviction that the history of race has been—and still is—extraneous to Switzerland. This conviction explains the belated emergence of anti-racist movements and adoption of anti-racist legislation in comparison to the broader European context. It is also at the root of the current 'restrained recognition of Swiss forms of racism' in which racism is reduced to individual intentions and refers to explicitly violent verbal or physical acts that are disconnected from broader structures and histories.[64] From this perspective, I claim that sheepology constitutes a powerful site of investment for the (white) majority of Swiss society because it secures a narrative of exceptionalism. This narrative entails that those who are marked by racial difference have been and continue to be absent from the Swiss territory and body. Sheepology partakes of a politics of postcoloniality which privileges the denial of the past and present of racism in Switzerland, and which leaves hardly any room for the participation of the individuals who are the most exposed to racism.

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Notes

[1] Patricia Purtschert, Barbara Lüthi and Francesca Falk (eds), *Postkoloniale Schweiz: Formen und Folgen Eines Kolonialismus ohne Kolonien*, Bielefeld: Transcript, 2012; see also Patricia Purtschert, 'Chewing on Post_Colonial Switzerland: Redigesting What Has Not Yet Been Swallowed', in Andrea Thal (ed.), *Chewing the Scenery 2nd Edition,* Zürich: Edition Fink, 2011.

[2] Purtschert, Lüthi and Falk, *Postkoloniale Schweiz.*

[3] David Theo Goldberg, *The Threat of Race: Reflections on Racial Neoliberalism*. Maden, MA: Oxford, VIC: Wiley-Blackwell, 2009; Fatima El-Tayeb, *European Others: Queering Ethnicity in Postnational Europe*, Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2011.

[4] Goldberg, *The Threat of Race,* p 169.

[5] El-Tayeb, *European Others,* pp xxiv–xxv.

[6] Discourse analysis from poststructuralist inspiration relies on an expansive understanding of 'discourse' which comprises visual, affective, verbal, and textual elements. It consists of the 'process of analysing signifying practices as discursive forms'; see David Howarth, *Discourse*, Maidenhead: Open University Press, 2000, p 10.

[7] Quoted in Blaise Lempen, 'Le Rapporteur de L'ONU dénonce', *La Liberté*, 1 September 2007. Before the sheep poster, other SVP campaigns had already been critiqued, such as a poster that showed hands of colour grabbing Swiss passports and a leaflet displaying the face of Bin Laden on a Swiss identity card. The most polemical campaigns were created by the same Agency, *Goal AG*, whose head, Alexander Segert, claims that he follows a formula of 'simple and stupid'; see Contocollias and Pignat, 'Le concepteur de la communication de l'UDC est un provocateur distingué et cultivé', *La Tribune de Genève*, 30 November 2010.

[8] For a review of the twentieth-century literature on Switzerland's entanglements with slavery and colonialism, see Patricia Purtschert, Francesca Falk and Barbara Lüthi. 'Switzerland and "Colonialism without Colonies"', *Interventions: International Journal of Postcolonial Studies*, 18(2), 2016, pp 286–302.

[9] Purtschert, Falk, and Lüthi, 'Switzerland and "Colonialism without Colonies"', p 287.

[10] Research has shed light on multiple forms and levels of entanglements between Switzerland and colonialism. See Bouda Etemad, Thomas David and Janick Marina Schaufelbuehl. *La Suisse et l'esclavage des Noirs*, Lausanne: Ed. Antipodes, 2005; Purtschert, Lüthi and Falk, *Poskoloniale Schweiz*; Hans Fässler, *Une Suisse Esclavagiste: Voyage dans un pays au-dessus de tout soupçon*, Paris: Duboiris, 2007; Patricia Purtschert and Harald Fischer-Tiné (eds), *Colonial Switzerland. Rethinking Colonialism Form the Margins*, Basingstoke: Palgrave-Macmillan, 2015.

[11] Anne McClintock, *Imperial Leather: Race, Gender and Sexuality in the Colonial Context*, London and New York: Routledge, 1995.

[12] Purtschert, Falk and Lüthi. 'Switzerland and "Colonialism without Colonies"', pp 293–298.

[13] See the study of Patricia Purtschert, '"De Schorsch Gaggo Reist Uf Arika": Postkoloniale Konstellationen Und Diskursive Verschiebungen in Schweizer Kindergeschichten', in Purtschert, Lüthi and Falk (eds),

Postkoloniale Schweiz: Formen Und Folgen Eines Kolonialismus ohne Kolonien, Bielefeld: Transcript, 2012, pp 89–116.

[14] See Purtschert's analysis of the figure of the 'white Negro' in 'De Schorch Gaggo'.

[15] In this regard, commodity racism in Switzerland conveys racialized meanings and hierarchies that are very similar to other contexts in colonial Europe. For the case of colonial Italy, see Gaia Giuliani and Cristina Lombardi-Diop, *Bianco e nero: Storia dell'identita' razziale degli italiani*, Firenze: Le Monnier università, 2013. For the case of colonial France, see Anne Donadey. '"Y'a Bon Banania": Ethics and Cultural Criticism in the Colonial Context', *French Cultural Studies,* 11(31), 2000, pp 9–29.

[16] Purtschert, 'De Schorch Gaggo'. For an extensive description of the images of the 'Africans' in colonial Switzerland, see also Patrick Minder, *La Suisse Coloniale, les Représentations de l'Afrique et des Africains en Suisse au temps des colonies (1880-1939)*, Berne: Peter Lang, 2011.

[17] Translation for the German expression '*Das (s)exotische Spektakel der Anderen*' is mine; Jovita dos Santos Pinto, 'Spuren: Eine Geschichte Schwarzer Frauen in Der Schweiz', in Berlowitz, Joris and Meierhofer-Mangeli (eds), *Terra Incognita? Der Treffpunkt Schwarzer Frauen in Zürich*, Zürich: Limmat Verlag, 2013, pp 143–185, p 150.

[18] Rea Brändle, 'La Monstration de l'autre en Suisse : Plaidoyer pour des micro-études', in Bancel, Blanchard, Boëtsch, Deroo and Lemaire (eds), *Zoos humains; au temps des exhibitions humaines*, Paris: La Découverte, 2002, pp 221–226; Minder, *La Suisse Coloniale*; Patricia Purtschert, 'The Return of the Native: Racialised Space, Colonial Debris and the Human Zoo', *Identities,* 22(4), 2014, pp 508–523.

[19] Minder, *La Suisse Coloniale*, p 105.

[20] One can mention the example of the successful musical 'the Lion King' (http://www.thelionking.ch/) that took place in Basel in 2015. For an exploration of the contemporary traces and renewing of the human zoo and its racialized space, see Purtschert, 'The Return of the Native'.

[21] Note that the law was adopted in 2010, as the SVP's so-called 'sheep initiative' was supported by a small majority of the Swiss people.

[22] Véronique Mottier, 'Narratives of National Identity: Sexuality, Race, and the Swiss "Dream of Order"', *Revue suisse de sociologie*, 26(3), 2000, pp 533–558, p 539.

[23] Clive H. Church and Randolph. C. Head, *A Concise History of Switzerland*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013, p 227.

[24] Mottier, 'Narratives of National Identity', pp 548–549 and p 552, see also Purtschert, Lüthi and Falk, *Postkoloniale Schweiz*, pp 41–44.

[25] Mottier, 'Narratives of National Identity', pp 548–549; Pascal Germann. 'Race in the Making: Colonial Encounters, Body Measurements and the Global Dimensions of Swiss Racial Science, 1900-1950', in Patricia Purtschert and Harald Fischer-Tiné (eds), *Colonial Switzerland. Rethinking Colonialism from the Margins*, Basingstoke: Palgrave-Macmillan, 2015, pp 51–72.

[26] Etemad, David, and Schaufelbuehl, *La Suisse et l'esclavage des Noirs*, pp 103–104; dos Santos Pinto, 'Spuren', p 149.

[27] Mottier, Véronique. 'Eugenics and the Swiss Gender Regime: Women's Bodies and the Struggle against Difference', *Swiss Journal of Sociology*, 32(2), 2006, pp 253–267.

[28] Harald Fischer-Tiné, 'The Other Side of Internationalism: Switzerland as a Hub of Militant Anti-Colonialism, C. 1910-1920', in Patricia Purtschert and Harald Fischer-Tiné (eds), *Colonial Switzerland. Rethinking Colonialism from the Margins*, Basingstoke: Palgrave-Macmillan, 2015, pp 221–258; Rohit Jain. 'Assimilation, Exotik und globale indische Moderne. Transnationale Subjektivierungsprozesse von "InderInnen der zweiten Generation" aus der Schweiz', Universität Zürich: unpublished dissertation, 2014; Patrick Kury, *Über Fremde Reden: Überfremdungsdiskurs und Ausgrenzung in Der Schweiz 1900-1945*, Zürich: Chronos, 2003.

[29] See dos Santos Pinto, 'Spuren' and James Baldwin, 'Stranger in a Village', in *Notes of a Native Son*, 8th edition, Boston, MA: Beacon Press, 1963, pp 159–175.

[30] For a detailed account of the controversy, see Noémi Michel, 'Quand les mots et les images blessent: postcolonialité, égalité et politique des actes de discours en Suisse et en France', Dissertation: Université de Genève, SES 872. 2014

[31] El-Tayeb, *European Others,* p xxix.

[32] Andrew Katumba, Nathalie Fellrath-Owanga, Félicienne Villoz Lusamba Muamba, Ricardo Lumengo, Carl-Alex Ridoré, Mandu dos Santos Pinto, Serge Sagbo, Alpha Dramé and Liliane Grimm, Pressekonferenz 19.09.2007 in Bern; Begrüssung Und Einleitung 2007. Available at : http://www.katumba.ch/pdf/PK_Bern_190907_Einleitung.pdf (accessed 15 March 2014).

33 Switzerland is a federal state which comprises 26 states called 'cantons'.

34 Katumba et al. '*Pressekonferenz'*. Emphasis is mine. Translation for German is my own.

35 Nicole Doerr, Alice Mattoni and Simon Teune, 'Toward a Visual Analysis of Social Movements, Conflict, and Political Mobilization', in Doerr, Mattoni and Teune (eds), *Advances in the Visual Analysis of Social Movements*, Bingley: Emerald Group Publishing Limited, 2013, pp xi–xxvi, p xvi.

36 Alpha Dramé and Nathalie Fellrath quoted in Maurice Page, 'Ils sont Noirs et rêvent d'aller à Berne', *La Liberté*, 20 September 2007. Translation for French is my own.

37 Ricardo Lumengo quoted in Swissinfo.ch, 'Gemeinsam auf Vertrauen bauen', *Swissinfo.ch*, 19 September 2007. Translation for German is my own.

38 Mottier, 'Narratives of National Identity', pp 533–534.

39 Matteo Gianni, 'Le Multiculturalisme en Suisse: Quelques Regards Critiques, Colloque du 24 et 25 Mai 2002', in Schweizerische Akademie der Geistes- und Sozialwissenschaften (eds), *Les Musulmans de Suisse*, Bern: SAGW, 2003.

40 Alpha Dramé quoted in SDA, 'Fédérales 07: des Candidats Noirs réagissent à la Campagne de L'UDC', *SDA*, 19 September 2007. Translation for French is my own.

41 Katumba et al. '*Pressekonferenz'*. Translation for German is my own.

42 Following Stuart Hall, El-Tayeb describes the internalist narrative as 'one in which Europe appears as a largely homogeneous entity, entirely self-sufficient, its development uninfluenced by outside forces or contact with other parts of the world'. El-Tayeb, *European Others*, p xvii.

43 Goldberg, *The Threat of Race*, p 155.

44 David Howarth, 'Discourse Theory', in David Marsh and Gerry Stoker (eds), *Theory and Methods in Political Science*, Basingstoke: MacMillan, 1995, pp 115–136, p 124.

45 Jacob Torfing, *New Theories of Discourse : Laclau, Mouffe and Žižek*. Oxford, Malden, MA: Blackwell, 1999, p 293, note 2.

46 Indeed, executive and legislative authorities did not forbid or officially condemn the sheep poster. The letters sent by the UN's special reporters were addressed by the Federal Council with a very short answer that emphasized the prevalence of freedom of expression in the context of Swiss direct democracy. The Public Ministry of Zurich dismissed the complaint regarding the violation of the anti-discriminatory penal law. The motions and demands made in the local parliaments were either rejected or reported to a later date of discussion. In short, despite their wide circulation in the Swiss public sphere, and their presence in the media, anti-racist articulatory practices had no impact on the sheep poster.

47 Alexis Barbey, Alexandre Chevalier, Jean Sanchez, Florence Kraft-Babel, Danièle Magnin, Nathalie Fontanet, Conseil Municipal, and Ville de Genève. 'Genève est contre l'exclusion', 2007. The authors of this motion were representatives of the local right-wing parties of liberal tradition.

48 Conseil Municipal, 'Mémorial des séances du Conseil Municipal de La Ville de Genève, Neuvième Séance – Mardi 11 Septembre 2007, à 20 H 30', 2007, p 955. Emphasis is mine. Translation for French is my own.

49 Besides Geneva, Basel and Neuchâtel also conducted counter-campaigns.

50 Pierre-Yves Rapaz quoted in Grand Conseil du Canton de Vaud. 'Bulletin Du Grand Conseil', 11 September 2007, p 19. Emphasis is mine. Translation for French is my own.

51 Swiss SVP. Himmel und Hölle 2007. Available at: http://www.svp.ch/aktuell/medienmitteilungen/linke-wollen-nicht-ueber-die-wirklichen-probleme-reden/ (accessed 30 May 2013). Note that the SVP had to stop the diffusion of the video as it was revealed that the young actors had been recruited under the false motive of taking part to a prevention clip for schools.

52 Conseil Municipal, 'Mémorial des Séances', 2007, p 950. Emphasis is mine. Translation for French is my own.

53 Sara Ahmed, *The Cultural Politics of Emotions*, Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2004.

54 Parti radical Genève and Les femmes radicales, Vous voulez chasser le mouton noir? Nous pas 2007. Available at: https://web.archive.org/web/20071221034410/http://www.onsemarre.ch/?p=72 (accessed 5 February 2014). Translation for French is my own. Note that the party used images of the famous artists Beyoncé and D'Angelo without mentioning their names. For accounts on the gendered sexualization of 'blackness', see Patricia Hill Collins, *Black Sexual Politics: African Americans, Gender, and the New Racism,* New York: Taylor & Francis, 2004.

55 RTS.ch., Le Parti Radical répond aux affiches polémiques de l'UDC montrant un mouton noir 2007. Available at: http://www.rts.ch/video/info/journal-19h30/1490083-le-parti-radical-repond-aux-affiches-polemiques-de-l-udc-montrant-un-mouton-noir.html (accessed 10 February 2014). Translation for French is my own.

56 For further accounts about the contemporary reproduction of white Swissness, see Noémi Michel and Manuela Honegger, 'Thinking Whiteness in French and Swiss Cyberspaces', *Social Politics*, 17(4), 2010, pp 423–449

and Anne Lavanchy, 'Glimpses into the Hearts of Whiteness: Institutions of Intimacy and the Desirable National', in Patricia Patricia Purtschert and Harald Fischer-Tiné (eds), *Colonial Switzerland. Rethinking Colonialism from the Margins*, Basingstoke: Palgrave-Macmillan, 2015, pp 278–295. Kristin Lofsdottir and Lars Jensen account for a very similar relations between hegemonic notions of exceptionalism and the construction of whiteness in the context of the Nordic countries. See Kristín Loftsdóttir and Lars Jensen, 'Nordic Exceptionalism and the Nordic "Ohters"', in Kristín Loftsdóttir (ed.), *Whiteness and Postcolonialism in the Nordic Region: Exceptionalism, Migrant Others and National Identities*, Franham: Ashgate, 2012, pp 1–12.

[57] El-Tayeb, *European Others*; Goldberg, *The Threat of Race.*

[58] El-Tayeb, *European Others*, p xxii.

[59] Translation for French is my own.

[60] Contrary to the 2007 initiative, the majority of the Swiss citizens refused the 2016 initiative.

[61] See Georg Kreis, *Kein Volk Von Schafen – Rassismus und Antirassismus in Der Schweiz*, Zürich: Salis Verl, 2007.

[62] Following Rohit Jain, one could say that the sheep partakes of 'colonial narratives and cultural stereotypes [that] are re-articulated to make sense of, and to drive, global capitalist transformation and expansion', Rohit Jain, 'Bollywood, Chicken Curry – and IT: The Public Spectacle of the Indian Exotic, and Postcolonial Anxieties in Switzerland', in Patricia Purtschert and Harald Fischer-Tiné (eds), *Colonial Switzerland. Rethinking Colonialism from the Margins*, Basingstoke: Palgrave-Macmillan, 2015, pp133–153.

[63] Purtschert, Falk and Lüthi, 'Switzerland and "Colonialism without Colonies"', p 293.

[64] Purtschert, 'De Schorch Gaggo', p 112. Translation for German is my own.