Doing good in blackface: a consuming story

Michel, Noemi Vanessa

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Noémi Michel[1]

[1]Dr. Noémi Michel is an activist, anti-racist and feminist scholar. She is a member of the European Race and Imagery Foundation (ERIF), as well as of the Collectif Faites des Vagues (based in Geneva). She is a senior lecturer in political theory at the Department of Political Science of the University of Geneva. Her research and teaching interests are in the areas of post-colonial and critical race theory, with a focus on diasporic Black feminist thought. Her recent work has been published in Critical Horizons, Postcolonial studies and Social politics. Her current research explores on the one hand conflicting grammars of anti-racism in European public debates and institutions, and on the other Black feminist theorization of political voice.

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Introduction: a trigger and a letter

Vignette 1: encountering blackface

> On the cold morning of October 2012, as I was crossing the hall of the university to reach my office, I made a strange encounter. Two posters hung beside the lifts. They staged Christoph Blocher and Oscar Freysinger, renowned politicians of the Swiss People's Party, a far right-wing, powerful political party in Switzerland.
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> Something had changed in their usual appearance. As I approached the wall more closely, I was struck: Christoph Blocher had been renamed "Mustapha Blocher", his white skin had been darkened, he was wearing a light blue t-shirt. Behind him appeared to be desert and fire. At the bottom of the image, I read the following banner: "After being born again as a Somali, he would have been happy to have opposed the hardening of the Asylum law". Accompanied by a similar banner, the second poster staged Oscar Freysinger as "Yusuf Freysinger" as a "Syrian" hiding in the ruins of a city destroyed by war. On the right corner, the name of the campaign "Enough!" was surrounded by the logos of several NGOs and human rights organizations that are active in the domain of asylum and immigration.
>
> I reached my office. I went on Facebook. My timeline was full of these images. Friends, and friends of friends, were liking and reposting the campaign. I clicked on the Facebook page of the campaign and learned that it was led by the Swiss section of Amnesty International. Besides the declination of posters, it also offered a video. The latter staged the "born again" politicians in a Swiss centre for asylum seekers. Freezing and hungry, they ended up eating the mascot of their political party, Zottel the goat. I felt dizzy. I disliked the campaign, I disliked the blackface, I disliked the representation of miserable landscapes. My dizziness made me write an e-mail to some of my colleagues.

Vignette 1 recalls the strange encounters with printed and digital blackface that I had at my workplace at the University in Geneva in Switzerland. I reported these encounters to a loose collective comprised of seven scholars and activists spread across the country, involved in postcolonial and critical race research and activism – a topic and field very young to Switzerland. Several email exchanges followed.

All the members of our collective had been working on bringing Switzerland's colonial complicities and racist archives onto the public agenda in order to think of these histories' effects on present racism.[1] Given these shared concerns, the use of blackface in the Amnesty International campaign brought us into states of unease. Our research had identified blackface as a crucial element of the material and cultural conditions of the hegemonic white public space of Switzerland, be it in ethnic comedy,

carnival, children's books or advertising.[2] However, it almost felt surreal – and shocking – that possible allies in the struggle against racism, such as Amnesty International (A.I.), used blackface to ridicule right-wing politicians, in order to mobilize the public against a racist asylum policy. Despite its "good cause", the campaign reproduced visual histories and imaginaries of race and racism and played with bodily, cultural and geographic attributes marking some of us as racially different.

Our unease originated in a dilemma. On the one hand, we shared the goals and concerns of A.I.'s campaign; we too belonged to the minoritized side within a public debate on migration and asylum, dominated by far right-wing positions. We too were concerned with the increased power of right-wing national and local parties that had mobilized the tools of Swiss direct democracy to spread xenophobic and racist images, discourses and affects, as well as to harden migration and asylum policies. On the other hand, given that the Swiss public culture was dominated by a state of colonial amnesia and racial denial, we found it to be especially crucial to raise awareness about the logics and the effects of blackface. However, we did not want our criticism to be instrumentalized by right-wing commentators, as one of us had written in the e-mail exchanges: "We should find a form of intervention which does not erase the preoccupation of the campaign (right-wing media would be very happy to see that people from the left oppose each other…), but which gains relevance."[3]

We decided to write a letter in French and German titled "Jetzt ist genug – stop Blackfacing" ["Now it's enough – stop Blackface"] and sent it privately, per e-mail, to the seven NGOs that had supported the campaign. Our aim was to enter into a discussion about the campaign and our criticism. We wanted to amplify our postcolonial reading of race in Switzerland and gain adhesion to such an understanding amongst key and powerful stakeholders of the debates on human rights and equality. After having received our letter, the A.I. campaigners wrote back to us with a three-page letter, and invited us to a face-to-face encounter. During our meeting, they refused to acknowledge our critique, namely that blackface was a racist practice based on a visual archive of colonial Swiss racism, which functions to this day as a tool of exclusion and domination.

This article re-visits our failed intervention. I consider the latter as a telling case for understanding racism's renewal at the crossroads of neoliberal humanitarianism and persisting ideologies of racial innocence in contemporary Europe. Whereas dominant public debates and scholarship tend to locate anti-racism's most urgent challenges in the struggle against far right-wing populism and extremist white supremacy, I claim that it is no less urgent to grasp how do-gooders' (anti-)racism (exemplified here by the Swiss section of A.I.) hinders anti-racist efforts. In dialogue with critical race, queer of colour and Black feminist literature, I show that do-gooders take part in complex processes that consume – both by burning and eating – political anti-racisms stemming from subaltern traditions of resistance. In other words, blackface, both as a practice and as an object of debate, not only consumes

the attributes of people marked by racial difference, but also the very energies necessary to contest that violent consumption. This article, in short, tells a story of consumption.

The non-performativity of anti-racism: towards a story of consumption

What specifically explains that our anti-racist intervention failed? What explains that a process that fostered an encounter between supposedly like-minded people, all invested in anti-racism, led to no other results than time and energy loss? If we follow feminist re-workings of Austin's speech act theory,[4] such questions point towards anti-racism's performativity, namely anti-racist discourses' power to transform reality by enacting what they say or ask for. What explains, then, that anti-racist speech act fail to enact what they say, thus falling in the category that Austin names "infelicities"?[5]

By re-visiting the Austinian model, Sara Ahmed coins the "non-performativity of antiracism" in order to shed light on the ways institutional anti-racist discourses “do not do what they say: they do not, as it were, commit a person, organization, or state to an action”.[6] Her analysis of various written and oral speech acts within academic writing, institutional documents, or public culture – for instance universities’ stated commitments to diversity – prompt a model of failure, which contrasts with Austin’s explanation for speech acts’ “infelicities”. Whereas the latter argues that speech acts fail if they are not enunciated under the right circumstances or with honest intentions, Ahmed locates failure within the speech act itself: “the failure of the speech act to do what it says is not a failure of intent or even circumstance, but it is actually what the speech act is doing.” In other words, “it ‘works’ because it fails to bring about what it names.”[7] Commitments to be anti-racist, Ahmed explains, are non-performative, because they paradoxically fuel the terrain for racism as they block self-scrutiny, action, or accountability with regards to accusations of racism.

Furthermore, Ahmed claims that analysing anti-racism’s failure necessitates conducting "an ethnography of texts":

> Such an approach still considers texts as actions, which "do things," but it also suggests that "texts" are not "finished" as forms of action, as what they "do" depends on how they are "taken up." To track what texts do, we need to follow them around. If texts circulate as documents or objects within public culture, then our task is to follow them, to see how they move as well as how they get stuck.[8]

Ahmed thus conducts interviews with diversity practitioners in the UK in order to track the ways their daily practice relates to written anti-racist institutional commitment.

Inspired by Ahmed’s approach, the story I tell in this article draws upon an ethnography of text – the text being my collective's letter of protest against A.I.'s campaign "Enough". In line with Ahmed’s call

to follow texts around, I follow our letter in order to unravel the ways it fails to produce social change, accountability or action amongst its targeted audience. In doing so, I deploy a "scavenger methodology";[9] I select the mode of analysis and the data that I deem relevant at each stepping stone of our letter's path towards failure. First, I re-visit the letter through a close reading. I show that the letter constitutes an example of “political anti-racism”, which contrasts with the European dominant grammar of anti-racialism - less concerned with countering racism than with simply wiping out the very category of race.[10] Second, a dialogue between critical studies of racism's renewal and my reading of the "Enough" campaign, as well as A.I.'s written response to our letter allows me to account for the broader context of our intervention. I contextualize the latter within the changing landscape of post-war anti-racism in Europe, marked by the advent of “charitainment” – namely by humanitarianism’s increased pairing with entertainment[11] – as well as by renewed ideologies of racial innocence. Finally, adopting an auto-ethnographic approach, I re-visit our meeting with the three spokespersons of A.I. at its Swiss headquarters in Bern. I draw upon three vignettes to provide a thick experiential description of the meeting as well as to unravel the manifold verbal, affective and spatial mechanisms that lead our text and our claims to “get stuck”.

This path leads me to nuance and complement Ahmed's model of failure. Non-performativity, in my story, emanates less from the nature of the speech acts contained in the anti-racist letter, than from the (re)production of unequal relations between subjects and discourses interpellated around the letter. I argue those unequal relations pertain to logics of consumption understood in two senses. On the one hand, consumption refers to logics that *burn* anti-racism's performativity. Consumption refers to affects, relations, discourses, practices or modes of reception that contribute to mark and materialize certain anti-racist discourses as illegible, inaudible, illogic, uninteresting and even criminal. They contribute to what David Theo Goldberg names the "evaporation" of anti-racism from the domain of what needs to be collectively addressed and redressed.[12] On the other hand, following bell hooks' famous essay "Eating the Other", consumption must be read as one of the dominant relationships in capitalist societies. Consuming logics, in that second sense, refer to practices, relations, discourses and affects that "eat" and absorb political protests by re-inscribing them in circuit of commodification and come to block the forging of “communities of resistance”.[13]

Writing against blackface: attempting political anti-racism

The letter I follow around in this article is written both in French and German and complemented by an appendix of visual archives. It is addressed to Amnesty International and the other NGOs behind the “Enough!” campaign. From the beginning, the letter insists upon its authors’ shared commitment to the goals of the campaign. At the same time, it denounces the campaign’s use of blackface, as claimed in the following excerpt: “Although the campaign pursues an anti-racist intention, it draws upon stereotypical images that inscribe themselves in a racist tradition.”[14]

By contrasting its authors' understanding of anti-racism with A.I.'s anti-racism, the letter sheds light on two apparent paradoxes: first, it shows that anti-racist claims can oppose each other, and second that certain forms of anti-racism can produce racism. Such paradoxes are well grasped by David Theo Goldberg's differentiation between anti-racialism and anti-racism.[15] Anti-racial commitment, he writes, "takes a stand, instrumental or institutional, against a concept, a name, a category, a categorizing", namely against race, but "does not itself involve standing (up) against (a set of) conditions of being or living".[16] Anti-racism, rather than simply "taking a stand", means "standing (up) against" racist conditions. In this section, I associate our letter with anti-racism, that is with the category of interventions that seek to stand up against racism. More specifically, re-visiting the document through the lenses of critical race and queer of colour interventions leads me to qualify our document as a written attempt to perform what I define as "political anti-racism".

I propose to define political anti-racism as the performance of spatio-temporal articulations, shedding light on racism's power relations, structures and discourses combined with a caring (re-)orientation towards the racially subjugated. Goldberg helps me to specify spatio-temporal articulations as the first necessary dimension of political anti-racism. He writes that "antiracism requires historical memory, recalling the conditions of racial degradation and relating contemporary to historical and local to global conditions".[17] In this perspective, standing up against racist conditions implies articulating the object or event deemed racist (in our case A.I.'s blackface) with the history of violence the latter (re)produces. It requires recalling how the objects and/or events deemed racist partake in relations, structures and discourses of domination between racialized geographical and bodily spaces (i.e. between Europe and the rest of the world, between white and non-white bodies).

I complement Goldberg's definition with critical Black and queer of colour interventions that emphasize "aspects of corporeality and embodiment and of the violence done to bodies and psyches".[18] Therefore, political anti-racism comprises, as a second necessary dimension the (re-)orientation towards the subjects who have been and are (re-)wounded by racism. It requires attending to the psychological and corporeal injuries – to the "history that hurts".[19] In what follows, I highlight how the letter against "Enough" deploys both dimensions of political anti-racism; namely, how it performs spatio-temporal articulations all oriented towards opening up space and care centred on Blacks and people of colour.

The first part of the letter – titled "Blackfacing" – articulates the campaign "Enough!" to the global history and entangled spaces of blackface practices, that we qualify as a "tradition of invisibilising and silencing of minorities".[20] The blackface used for the depiction of the right-wing politicians in the campaign is articulated to the minstrel shows that emerged in the US during the 18th century, to racist representations in 20th century popular movies (e.g. Breakfast at Tiffany's), but also to the very popular costumes of "Africans", "Chinese" or "Indians" that people wear during carnivals in

Switzerland. These representations, the letter claims, all work through the appropriation of the skin and bodily attributes of an "other". Moreover, this appropriation enacts a form of enjoyment: the appropriating subjects experience their transgressions as funny and fascinating. Such a mode of representation, the letter claims, renews racial hierarchy: it produces imagery of Blacks and other racialized minorities in a demeaning and mocking mode at the service of whites' transgressive experiences.

In its second part – titled "Satire" – the letter enacts another set of spatio-temporal articulations: it situates the blackface of "Enough!" within the last three decades' political and ideological history of Switzerland. On the one hand, this recent history relates to the rising dominance of the far right-wing agenda on migration and asylum, led by the Swiss People's Party (SVP) and their disruptive, blatantly racist and often satiric visual and verbal rhetoric. The campaign "Enough", the letter claims, mimics SVP's racist satirical mode of communication.[21] On the other hand, Switzerland's recent history is marked by the increasing feeling of impotence amongst the leftist and liberal (mainly white) public. "Enough", the letter claims, partakes in the increasing recourse to racist humour and satire by progressive and supposedly anti-racist actors[22]. The A.I. campaign is thus put in relation to several examples – both in the letter's text and in its appendix of visual archives – amongst them the famous brownface Indian figure "Rajiv Prasad", one of the most popular characters on the Late Night Show *Viktors Spätprogramm*:

> Such artistic and political interventions certainly signal that the Left and other critics of the SVP would like to distance themselves from the dusty and excessively serious image of proponents of political correctness in order to gain attention of a wider audience. (....)
>
> Using images and modes of representations that have historically nurtured racism contributes to anchor stereotypical representations in the public space (...) We wonder whether asylum seekers, foreigners and ethno-racial minorities whose traits and first names are mobilized in the name of satire were consulted during the production of "Enough".[23]

While shedding light on the convergences between do-gooders and right-wing populists, usually deemed as opponents, the letter seeks to re-orient its addressees' attention towards the "ethno-racial minorities" – i.e. towards those who are transformed into the "mocked object". We therefore seek to intervene into a situation of racialized neglect within the prevailing ideological and public space.

In the third part of the letter (titled "Empathy"), we claim that "Enough" draws upon a "benevolent pity" towards the asylum seekers (portrayed through the blackfaced right-wing politicians). Pity depends on a clear-cut separation between Switzerland and asylum seekers' unnamed countries of origin, whose visual representation as miserable, poor, devoid of any other human activity than violence implies that Switzerland is a prosperous space, a "small island of innocence" welcoming

refugees with charity.[24] As exemplified by the following excerpt, our text re-articulates the Swiss space to global spaces in order to disrupt such an insularising and exonerating national representation:

> Swiss industries and development policies, or Swiss delegations within the World Bank or other organisations very often mingle with the actors who produce violence and poverty in the regions of provenance of the asylum seekers. (...)
>
> We claim that the duty of hospitality does not depend on benevolent pity, but on the participation and responsibility of Switzerland to global inequalities.[25]

In Goldberg's terms, the letter relates the local (Switzerland) to global conditions. On this basis, it aims to re-orient its addressees towards a form of collective responsibility, which does not rest on assimilatory and simplifying identifications with the "other" (transformed into the "same"), but rather on the recognition of the other's difference and complex stories, as well as reasons to move against the backdrop of transnational entanglements.

Let me come back to my concern with the non-performativity of anti-racism. What explains that our letter fails to undo racism? If we follow Ahmed's model of non-performativity, the failure should be located in the nature of the speech act. The institutional documents that she scrutinizes in her research succeed in reassuring good anti-racist intentions, but fail to produce change. Those documents perform the institution's commitment for equality or diversity, or its recognition of the existence of structural racism. However, they do not engage their authors and audience to further action.[26] To put it in Goldberg's terms, they fail to undo racism because they take a stance without standing up against racist conditions; they exemplify the failure that is implied by anti-racial commitments.

However, our letter does not fall in the category of non-performative anti-racial commitments. As I have shown, the text I follow here is of a different nature: it falls in the category of political anti-racist interventions. Our letter seeks to stand up against blackface by historicising the practice, by situating it within local and global interdependent spaces in order to render legible and to change the conditions that prompt unease and injury amongst subjects marked by racial difference, including some of us. I define it as a political intervention, because it seeks to disrupt the prevailing racially excluding space of public participation. It seeks to convey "the very vocabulary necessary to recall and recollect, to make a case, to make a claim",[27] thus to enable the racially subjugated to name the power relations, structures and discourses needing to be transformed within Swiss and broader collectivities. Since the failure does not come from the nature of the speech acts contained in the letter, I need to put forward an understanding of the non-performativity of anti-racism, which differs from (and complements) Ahmed's model. As I show in the following sections, political anti-racisms end up failing to provoke change because they undergo processes that consume their performative power. The difficulties faced

by political anti-racism must be located in the numerous processes that expose it to consumption, both in the sense of being burnt and being eaten.[28]

When do-gooders use blackface: between charitainment and racial innocence

In Austin's original model of performativity, "failed performatives are 'unhappy': they do not act, because the conditions are not in place that are required for the action to succeed".[29] The felicity of speech acts depends on conventions being rightly invoked during the enunciative event. For instance, the phrase "I declare you married" is not followed by any effects if it is not enunciated according to legal and social conventions in place, in a given context.[30] What circumstances are not in place for the letter I follow around to succeed? I propose to twist the Austinian question and ask rather: what broader circumstances *are so in place* that they hinder political anti-racist interventions from succeeding in dismantling blackface in contemporary Swiss and European contexts? Indeed, following Goldberg, political anti-racists fail, they end up "mouthing words no one else recognizes", because prevailing and surrounding hegemonic modes of invoking race make their claims evaporate and burn out.[31] What are the hegemonic evocations of race that facilitated the consumption of the analysis and claims contained in our letter? Also, how did the consumption operate? My answer, in this section, stems from the dialogue of the study of humanitarianism in critical race and feminist literature with two further sources of qualitative data: the campaign "Enough", and the three-page written answer (in German) that A.I. sent us per e-mail a few days after having received our letter of protest.

At first glance, A.I.'s embracing of blackface seems very paradoxical. Indeed, A.I. is a world-renowned humanitarian organization explicitly committed to anti-racism,[32] as the latter is embedded within urgent humanitarian concerns such as the defence of asylum seekers and refugees, the struggle against poverty and for global development. These concerns stem from the long history of various movements of charity and solidarity including religious missions, the Red Cross, slavery abolitionist groups, as well as solidarity campaigns for independence movements in the so-called "Third World".[33] They also stem from anti-racism's institutionalization within human rights organizations and the international community, after World War II.[34] These legacies are constitutive of humanitarian organizational culture and professional identity that lead most of the old and new staff of human rights-oriented NGOs to whole-heartedly claim to be anti-racist, or at least "against racism". Such a commitment is re-asserted in the very first sentences of A.I.'s written response: "We share your critique of racism [Rassimuskritik] and we can understand most of your critical points when we look at the situation from your perspective as researchers".[35]

However, the use of blackface by humanitarian organizations who claim to be anti-racist becomes less paradoxical when we rely on critical race and feminist literature. This literature leads me to read the campaign "Enough" as a telling – and very banal – example of the use of racist representations by

NGOs and humanitarian organizations, which I re-group under the label of "do-gooders' organizations".[36] Hence, I situate “Enough” at the crossroads of two important trends in the reconfiguration of racial language in contemporary continental Europe. Charitainment on the one hand and racial innocence on the other constitute the hegemonic circumstances under which race is invoked and discussed in contemporary Swiss and European do-gooders' organizations, and under which political anti-racist energies tend to get consumed.

The first trend, charitainment, consists of the rising collapse between humanitarianism, development discourses and entertainment. In response to the last decade’s increasing success of right-wing nationalist and anti-immigrant discourses and policies, do-gooders’ organizations have sought to renew their communication style and strategy. Their campaigns increasingly supplement the classic tools of press release, posters and street demonstrations with the use of social media platforms, cautiously designed websites and interactive webcasts. Through these various channels, they deploy a semiotic of “charitainment”, which collapses human rights and development with entertainment.[37] In constant search of media exposure, do-gooders tend to privilege sensationalized commodity-images over texts, to pitch simple stories to which Western donors can relate, and to mobilize celebrity ambassadors.[38] In other words, do-gooders’ organizations undergo processes of spectacularization[39] and corporatization: as exemplified by A.I. Australia associating with the hooking-up app Tinder to celebrate International Women’s Day in 2014;[40] by Oxfam mobilising celebrity ambassadors; or by *Médecins Sans Frontières* (MSF) circulating shocking digital photographs to raise funds.[41] Moreover, following consumer research, one can add that the increase of entertaining styles of communication amongst do-gooders' organizations certainly triggers "slacktivism" amongst their target audiences, namely "a willingness to perform a relatively costless, token display of support for a social cause, with an accompanying lack of willingness to devote significant effort to enact meaningful change."[42]

The 2012 “Enough” campaign by the Swiss section of A.I. is a telling case of the charitainment trend. It combines references to public personalities (the right-wing politicians) with provocative or humorous rhetoric and visuals. It is conveyed through multiple forms (images and video clips) and channels (social media, printed posters and flyers). In their response to our letter, the spokespersons for “Enough” themselves underscore entertainment as a priority in their communication strategy, writing that their campaign has to be “very catchy in order to be successful” and that they are concerned with having their messages sound “too elitist or intellectual for a large audience”.[43] Moreover, their measure of success follows a logic of slacktivism. Indeed, they affirm that their goal to make people think about the consequences of asylum politics is proved by the "numerous reactions" through "media, online platform and direct letters."[44] Since do-gooders increasingly rely on entertainment styles of communication, their use of blackface comes as no surprise.[45] Indeed, blackface constitutes a

key site for the production of a spectacle in line with mass entertainment culture and slacktivist social engagement, trending both globally and in the Swiss context.

I associate A.I.'s unsanctioned use of blackface with a second trend pertaining to a second hegemonic mode of evoking race: the persistent reproduction of national and organisational identity discourses of racial innocence. I rely here on Gloria Wekker's striking analysis of white Dutch self-representation, where she defines "innocence" as a sense of self informed by "being a small, but just" nation and "inherently on the moral and ethical high ground, thus a guiding light".[46] Such qualities strongly inform the dominant Swiss sense of self as well — a sense of self that is strongly permeating the Swiss section of A.I.'s identity. Switzerland is a small federal country, whose sense of being just is informed by the history of having successfully pacified conflicts related to internal linguistic and religious differences.[47] Its sense of being a moral guiding light is nurtured by a politics of neutrality in the international community and by hosting several human rights organizations, most notably the head of the United Nations in Geneva.

Wekker associates innocence with a sense of being "free of racism".[48] Such a sense, she claims, maintains racial privilege: "innocence (...) is strongly connected to privilege, entitlement, and violence that are deeply disavowed."[49] By pointing towards the active working of innocence through disavowal, Wekker echoes other critical studies of anti-racialism in Europe, all concerned with the complex mechanisms by which "racial thinking and its effects are made invisible".[50] Previous research suggests that the Swiss public culture draws upon the constant re-activation of a double racial denial. On the one hand, the denial of the past history of racism, a shared – false – conviction that the Swiss did not take part in colonialism and white imperialism because their country had no colonies.[51] On the other hand, such an amnesia comes to reinforce denials about the operation of race in the present according to the following logic: as racism has supposedly no history here, then denouncing its current operation makes no sense.[52]

I claim that prevailing investment in racial innocence translates in A.I. Switzerland's uncritical use of blackface in the "Enough" campaign; such an investment is clearly reflected by A.I.'s written answer. In its last part, the answer becomes rather defensive and deploys a list of refutations to our critique, the first point being our denunciation of blackface:

> We would like to clearly refute certain statements in your letter:
>
> 1. *the campaign uses the technique of "blackface" and recalls in this way a racist genre of the 19th century.* The video recalls however Variété or slapstick and the colouring in black of Swiss politicians renders them neither clownish nor exposes them to laughing based on stereotypes.[53]

Our statement about blackface and racism – the main object of our intervention against A.I's campaign – is here evoked in order to be immediately denied without any justification through a series of negations and the reference to other forms of genres. Such a production of (wilful) ignorance about the racist history of blackface benefits from a dominant national and organizational regime of amnesia. Moreover, capitalization on racial innocence explains A.I.'s very strong reluctance to consider that its imagery *could be racist:*

> our video (...) transmits an appeal to solidarity: "put yourself in my position". Your comparison to [blackface] is far-fetched.[54]

The disqualification of a scholarly well-backed up historical claim as "far-fetched" not only draws upon, but also reproduces a prevailing sense of racial innocence. In Charles Mills' terms, such a disqualification establishes "white ignorance" as the only legitimate knowledge.[55]

Why do humanitarians use blackface? As I have shown, today's Western humanitarianism duration and value in the globalized market of do-good nations and international organizations depends on two trends. On the one hand, do-gooders' organizations capitalize on racialized entertainment, such as blackface, in order to maintain competitiveness and material sustainability. On the other, they capitalize on the (fictional) narratives that elect them as exceptionally innocent. Since do-gooders take part to the reproduction of hegemonic languages of race oriented towards entertainment and exoneration, their use of blackface comes as no surprise.

Do-gooders' capitalization on charitainment and racial innocence, I claim, constitutes circumstances that are *so in place* that they cause the burning of alternative – critical – invocations of race. Those hegemonic circumstances consume political anti-racist interventions, such as the letter I follow in this article. They make political anti-racist efforts burn and disappear. Indeed, the letter performs spatio-temporal articulations that situate blackface within global and local colonial racist histories of violence. Such articulations become illegible under the invocation of blackface as an innocent and commodifiable pleasure. The letter seeks to re-orient the collective care towards racially subjugated subjects. Such a re-orientation becomes disoriented and blurred under a language solely concerned with gaining the attention of the large audience – namely white Swiss and European majoritized subjects. Let me add that charitainment and racial innocence tend to produce hegemonic modes of relating to the issue of racism amongst the European and Swiss publics. Whereas our letter calls for meaningful action, charitainment orients the public towards slacktivism and token support. Whereas our letter seeks to cultivate the need for the white majoritarian public to undergo the uncomfortable inspection of white privilege and power, racial innocence orients the same public towards the constant need to feel reassured. In sum, the dominant racial grammars underlying Western humanitarianism

blur not only the legibility of political anti-racism through forms of dehistoricization, but maintain "structures of feeling" that remain neglectful for those who are primarily affected by racism.[56]

In this section, I have tracked dominant languages under which race is invoked and discussed in contemporary European humanitarian contexts, as exemplified by A.I.'s campaign and written answer. Where does the failure of our anti-racist text come from? My contextualization leads to the following answer: from the consumption – the burning – of its meanings and caring orientations under prevailing hegemonic modes of invoking race. Written speech acts, Ahmed suggests, are unfinished actions.[57] Assessing texts' performativity, namely their propensity to act upon reality, requires reconstituting their circumstances across time. In the following section, I thus continue to unravel our letter's path towards failure. I show how the performativity of our text was further consumed during the meeting with the A.I. campaigners.

When do-gooders and political anti-racists meet: a consuming proximity

> Let us end this e-mail on a positive and constructive note. We think that instead of attacking each other, it would be better that we assemble our forces in order to find answers to our collective question together: how can we gain the adhesion of a broader public to a politics of asylum based on human dignity and how can we change xenophobic discourses? (...) following the motto: "If you came to help me, you waste your time. But if you came because your liberation is entangled with mine, then let us work together.[58]

These words come from the last segment of Amnesty International's written answer to our letter.[59] They proposed that we meet them for a "small round discussion" at their main office in Bern, or to suggest another place. Some parts of their response partially admitted aspects of our critique, but most parts expressed scepticism. We nonetheless agreed to meet them at their headquarters. We assumed that a face-to-face encounter would allow us to better communicate our written critique. Was it naivety, hope or obstinacy? We had certainly foreseen that a face-to-face encounter would facilitate reciprocity and mutual understanding. We were certainly unconsciously invested in the high value put on physical co-presence as a source of reciprocity and trust in social scientific literature,[60] as well as in the Swiss political culture which embraces direct democracy. We had ignored bell hooks' warnings against physical proximity, especially when it is informed by racialized power relations. Indeed, hooks claims that in contemporary capitalist societies, the desire to be close to the racially "other" more often underlies logics of commodification and appropriation:

> Currently, the commodification of difference promotes paradigms of consumption wherein whatever difference the Other inhabits is eradicated, via exchange, by a consumer cannibalism that not only displaces the Other but denies the significance of that Other's history through a process of decontextualization.[61]

Under such logics, the “other” is consumed as "a sign that progressive political change is taking place",[62] it is eaten, absorbed and thus blocked from actually carrying through protest and resistance. As I show in this section, the temporary co-presence enabled by our encounter with the A.I. representatives became the vessel for consumption understood, following hooks, as appropriation, absorption and being eaten.

Four of the seven authors of the original letter went to Bern, including myself, a Black cis-woman.[63] The political secretary received us in a friendly, yet tense, manner and accompanied us to a bright meeting room, where we were introduced to a middle-aged, white cis-man, as well as to the individual responsible for the campaign – a white cis-woman in her late 30s.[64] A Turkish-Swiss, middle-aged representative of a migrant association that had partnered with A.I. for the campaign was also present.[65] We were seated around tables arranged in an oval shape; the A.I. representatives next to each other and the four of us next to one another. The oval disposition of the tables reflected the "small round discussion" and the call to "work together", as was mentioned in A.I.'s written reply to us. The meeting was held mainly in English, but also in German.

I adopt an auto-ethnographic approach in order to recollect here three interacting logics of "eating the other". These logics capitalized on our proximity and instantiated us as spectator, border and stolen pain instead of mutual interlocutors. They unfolded on many layers during the meeting. They were produced by the spatial configuration, by the emotions circulating in the rooms and between the bodies, by certain verbal interactions, by tones and by facial expressions. Three ethnographic vignettes provide experiential descriptions that render palpable the manifold mechanisms that came to consume the proximity of our emotions, bodies and voices, and disrupt the expression of our anti-racist critique.[66]

> **Vignette 2: becoming spectator**
>
> The political secretary has welcomed us quite warmly. But as soon as we enter the meeting room, the atmosphere becomes cold. The A.I. representatives seem very distant, like soldiers on their guard.
>
> We have prepared our pitch. We shortly re-call that our aim is not to blame A.I. for being intentionally racist, because our understanding of racism is structural and historical. We synthetically re-formulate our main criticism concerning the use of blackface in the campaign.
>
> After just 15 minutes, the man, chief of the communications department, leaves the room. He says he has other professional obligations and asserts that the campaign has nothing to do with racism.

> The two other members of A.I. become more and more uneasy. Their response to our argument is defensive. They keep repeating that they care about not reproducing stereotypes and xenophobia in their campaigns. As we re-word our critique, they do not concede to any of our points and continue to repeat their defence.
>
> Besides an exchange of words, the meeting becomes highly invested by tense affects. Refusal to listen and repetition of defensiveness on the side of the A.I. members meets raising impatience on our side.

The scene that plays out in this vignette is pre-conditioned by affective investments from both sides, exposed in the previous sections. The “do-gooders” are highly invested in the conviction of being innocent. The political anti-racists are invested in the conviction that they can carry out their critique in order to forge a space oriented towards those who are primarily affected by racism. However, the latter conviction depends on the do-gooders’ acknowledgement that they too can take part in structural racism. The political anti-racists’ possibility to make their critique heard, depends on do-gooders’ re-orientation towards a “loss of innocence”.[67]

According to hooks, “[m]utual recognition of racism, its impact both on those who are dominated and those who dominate, is the only standpoint that makes possible the encounter between races that is not based on denial and fantasy.”[68] In the scene described in vignette 2, denial and fantasy take over. They take over when the white man leaves the space. They take over when the two remaining do-gooders increasingly channel defensiveness. The do-gooders keep repeating that they share the political anti-racists’ concerns and that they did not intend to produce a racist campaign. As Wekker has shown in the case of the Zwarte Piet debate, the "no bad intention" defence mechanism serves to preserve a "precious innocent sense of self" at all costs.[69] It recasts the political anti-racists as attackers.

The do-gooders' concern, because it keeps being repeated again and again, comes to colonize the “affective space” of the meeting.[70] Their preoccupation with being innocent becomes central and absorbing. Proximity, I suggest, is key for reading this scene. By having accepted to enter in the do-gooders' space and to be in dialogue with them, the political anti-racists have partially acknowledged the do-gooders’ capacity to be anti-racists. They have invested into a presupposed ideological proximity that led them to literally share a room. Now, their spatial proximity with the do-gooders becomes a trap. It is consumed, oriented towards the do-gooders’ central concern for innocence. Anti-racists’ insistence itself becomes food for this centralized concern. As soon as they are expressed, the political anti-racists’ words, gestures, eye contact, or emotions are re-directed and stuck with the do-gooders’ obsession with being good. Instead of being interlocutors in an equal dialogue, the political anti-racists are made into witnesses of an emotional spectacle.[71] They *become spectator*.

> **Vignette 3: becoming border**
>
> We become more and more insistent and assertive, repeating our critique again and again; we keep insisting upon the racism of the campaign.
>
> The two remaining campaigners, the two women, begin to complain about the process of producing the campaign. The campaign has been designed by a corporate public relations agency. They say that it is difficult to work with such companies, that they are expensive and did not give them a lot of choice. They say that this version of the campaign was the best, that the other options were "far more problematic".
>
> They complain, but at the same time, they reassert how necessary it is for them to work with a PR agency. Their organization, they recall, is under pressure to act in a fast and efficient way in order to have an impact with their campaign. For them, "impact" means that they reach the mainstream of society. They have to reach audiences already saturated with xenophobic messages, therefore they cannot have the luxury of appearing intellectual and elitist. Their campaign, they reassert, is a real success as the A.I. website had never been visited as much as during this campaign. The media was very receptive.

As Egbert Martina tellingly analyses in relation to the race debate in the Netherlands, the language of racial innocence requires an "act of distancing", it "requires, in fact, the singling out and the stigmatization of the 'wrong kind' of White person".[72] In dialogue with Martina, I want to emphasize that acts of distancing also depend on acts of making close. In vignette 3, the do-gooders seek to contain anti-racists' critical insistence with the means of confession. They confide that they undergo pressure and partial powerlessness due to greater forces of neoliberalism and far right-wing populism. Confidence produces a closeness with the political anti-racists and this closeness becomes the "proof" of being on the "right" side — the side of the *good* ones. Proximity here is used as a way for do-gooders to distance themselves from the *real evil whites*. The proximity of anti-racists' (partly non-white) bodies, is consumed for exoneration.

The "turn to innocence is essentially a move to deflect, it is a move to silence any critique of the systemic privileging of whiteness", writes Martina.[73] In vignette 3, do-gooders cast themselves on the side of the good, with the anti-racists as the border and the bad capitalists and populists on the side of evil. They impose a map which renders illegible the political anti-racists' critique of "Enough" as having emerged from the recent convergence between the left and far right-wing racialized positions. Such a map, in contrast, provides the do-gooders with a sense of epistemic and moral superiority. By admitting their powerlessness, the do-gooders, in the same move assume that they know better than the political anti-racists. They stage themselves as non-intellectuals, but, at the same time, erect themselves as the subjects of the right knowledge, as the ones who are able to perform the right

analysis of power and social transformation in contrast to political anti-racists who are staged as naïve idealist intellectuals. The proximity of political anti-racists is consumed at the service of a border that separates the so-called bad white racists from the good white anti-racists, as well as the naïve (very often Black and/or of colour), idealist anti-racists from the good humanitarians who know rightly about racism. To put it shortly, anti-racists become *a silenced moral and epistemic border.*

Vignette 4: becoming stolen pain

> We ask them if they have consulted asylum seekers, and more generally, people of colour during the process of producing the campaign. They hesitate a little and then say “No”.
>
> “It is problematic for me to see my hair texture and my skin colour being instrumentalized in order to mock politicians that already render my life quite difficult in this country”, says one of us.
>
> Everybody in the room stops breathing. The campaigners are affected by this sudden switch to the register of subjective feelings and injuries. After a little moment of silence, the younger campaigner answers that this critique seems personal. She says she knows other Black people who did not express any concern with the “Enough” campaign.
>
> Later, the meeting is over. We are about to leave and cordially, but quite coldly, greet each other in the entry room. The younger woman sticks to the one of us who has expressed her injury. She seems to want to absolve the reproach made to the campaign. She tells anecdotes of problematic events involving people of colour close to her. She does not let the one Black individual amongst us leave, but at the same time, she does not acknowledge the validity of her feelings.

After having been excluded from the territory of the subjects who know better about racism, being the only Black woman in the group, I switched to a more subjective register. I tried to capitalize on the atmosphere of confession and closeness, which has been initiated and established by the do-gooders. Taking up the language of confidence can be read as an attempt to gain affective currency, in order to re-orient attention towards the bodies and experiences racially instrumentalized by “Enough”. During a very small amount of time, my strategy succeeded. Both sides stopped breathing, their attention was caught, time seemed suspended. However, this affective convergence was rapidly disrupted and re-absorbed, re-directed towards the do-gooders’ concern with innocence.

Vignette 4, I claim, exposes ways of "eating the other" that serve what Serene Raszak, inspired by Saidiya Hartman, calls "stealing the pain of others" - describing a process whereby nationally or racially majoritized subjects relate to and use stories and images of Black pain:

> " [...] the pain and suffering of black people can become sources of moral authority and pleasure, obscuring in the process [whites'] participation in the violence that is done to them."[74]

In vignette 4, the do-gooder puts my Black anti-racist testimony into perspective by invoking divergent feelings of other Black subjects of her supposed close circle. In this brief interaction, the voice emanating from me, the Black subject who is present, is made distant, delegitimized via the instrumentalization of non-present Black subjects. The do-gooder juggles with Blacks' diverging confessions and forms of proximity: she dismisses the claim of the Black individual who is spatially proximate to her by invoking past claims of subjects absent from the shared space, but supposedly close to her. Black subjects – present and imaginary – become consumed, instrumental for the dismissal of the very injury that they are the most exposed to. The "claim of injury"[75] made by me, the Black anti-racist is eaten, made trivial[76] and thus stolen from me.

My story of pain is further stolen after the meeting in the entry room via the "slipperiness of empathy".[77] Empathy is slippery when it leads the empathetic subject to make the pain of the other his or her own: "the slipperiness begins in the act of identification with the other, an act that involves a consumption of the other, and thus the other's obliteration".[78]As analysed by Hartman, Razack and also Martina, empathy requires a declaration of being close to the other. In complement, my reading of vignette 4 suggests that slippery empathy can also work through concrete bodily proximity, as exemplified by the do-gooder literally barring the anti-racist's ability to escape her closeness. Although the meeting is over, the do-gooder sticks to the subject who expressed her injury. This is a way, I argue, to absorb her pain while obliterating her. The do-gooder's desire does not invest hope in structural change, but a perverse form of consumption: by sticking to the subject in pain, the do-gooders wish that the latter concedes to exoneration or self-trivialising, namely that she admits something along the lines of: "You are so close to me that you cannot be the cause of my pain", or: "You are so close to me that my pain does not count anymore. *You* count more".[79]

In sum, vignette 4 reveals how physical closeness facilitates the consumption – and trivialization – of anti-racists' claims of injury. Such a consumption nurtures the power asymmetry between the do-gooders and the political anti-racists. After having installed themselves as the ones who are better informed about how racism works and should be combatted, the do-gooders also erect themselves as the ones who better know whose feelings and experiences matter. The political anti-racists become *stolen pain*.

What anti-racist texts do, Ahmed suggests, depends on how they are taken up. However, what happens if the authors and the main addressees of a text meet? Who gets to control the ways an anti-racist text can be taken up? Inspired by hooks' warnings about racialized proximity, my account of the meeting between my collective of anti-racist protestors and the A.I. campaigners - self-perceived do-

gooders - shows that texts can be transformed into traps, serving the reproduction of unequal relations between diverging subjects and languages of anti-racism. Texts enable encounters, but the proximity they prompt can facilitate complex consuming mechanisms of the ideas, bodies and affects of their authors. Anti-racist texts not only risk failing at carrying out an effective anti-racist critique, they can be re-directed against their authors. They can channel a proximity for the sake of containment, their authors being consumed – "eaten" – by their addressees.

Conclusion: condensing anti-racist energies, from a safe distance

I have told the story of a failed intervention against the use of blackface by a prestigious humanitarian organization. Despite increasing social mobilization and awareness raising,[80] blackface continues to be popular in Europe's public culture and populates carnivals, fancy dress celebrity parties, comedy sketches, TV shows, performances and commercial and/or humanitarian advertisement. Blackface constitutes one of the main sites of public globalized debates about race. Not a single week passes without a news headline about an occurrence of blackface. Often, the individuals, groups or organizations who promote blackface belong to the progressive sides of the ideological landscape of Europe. They are do-gooders who oppose white supremacist and populist far right-wing forces.

Understanding do-gooders' racism is crucial for tackling racism's constant renewal in Europe. As Goldberg writes, anti-racist struggles from the 20th century, inscribed in anti-colonialism, civil rights and anti-apartheid movements, remain unfinished business. They have given way to "antiracial commitments *at the expense* of antiracist effects and ongoing struggle".[81]

My story has unravelled the ways anti-racists' efforts become expended by drawing on a scavenger methodology – mixing the close reading, contextualization and auto-ethnography of the various texts, events and relations prompted by the initial letter of protest of my collective. I thus contribute to critical race, feminist and queer of colour scholarship, which explains why and how the dominant language of anti-racialism "takes hold", "becomes insistent" and "makes itself heard".[82] Whereas this scholarship has predominantly targeted hegemonic anti-raci(ali)sm and accounts for its inefficiency, I have focused on the *encounters* between dominant and minoritized anti-racisms. Such a re-orientation allows me to offer two main contributions.

On the one hand, the close reading of my collective's letter of protest leads me to define and exemplify interventions that pertain to what I call "political anti-racism", which, in turn allows me to provide a clear-cut differentiation from the non-performative anti-racialisms criticized by Ahmed. Even if they name themselves identically – i.e. anti-racism – both forms of interventions differ radically in their orientation. Political anti-racists are concerned with undoing racism by transforming a set of conditions that narrow life and participation of the racially degraded, while primarily caring for the latter. In contrast, anti-racialists are concerned with preserving their moral capital of white innocence,

without giving up the commercial capital provided by racist neoliberal images and narratives (such as blackface). Within public debates, "real" or "true" anti-racism is associated either with its authors' good or bad intention or with its good or bad effects on the racially degraded. My emphasis on anti-racism's *orientation* offers an alternative beacon for reading and assessing different forms of anti-racisms.

On the other hand, following our anti-racist letter around permits me to elaborate a complex model of anti-racist failure. Failure, in my story, relates to the (re)production of unequal relations between subjects and discourses interpellated around a political anti-racist intervention. I coin "performative consumption" in order to shed light on logics that make the substance and effects of political anti-racism burn and be eaten. Performative consumption points towards the myriad and complexly layered mechanisms that deprive political anti-racist interventions of effective and affective power. Performative consumption transforms anti-racists' political labour into ashes and food during the reproduction of hegemonic (and non-performative) anti-rac(ial)isms.

What strategic lessons can we draw from this consuming story? How can political anti-racists avoid being consumed in their constant struggle? How could political (and most often racially minoritized) anti-racists counter the consumption of their bodily, affective and discursive energies? As a matter of conclusion, I tell the epilogue of my story and derive strategic lessons.

Four years after the meeting with the A.I. campaigners, I intervened with Rohit Jain, one of the other authors of the protest letter, and three other scholars and activists of colour in a roundtable devoted to the topic of colonialism, racism and democracy.[83] Rohit and myself reiterated many aspects of our anti-"Enough" letter. The roundtable was programmed in the framework of a major conference gathering progressive intellectuals and practitioners. Thus, one of the A.I. spokespersons whom we had met in Bern happened to be in the thousand-people audience. I learned about her presence several weeks later, as I discovered that she had tweeted my following sentence: “Switzerland conceives of itself falsely outside of colonialism and slavery” alongside a picture of Rohit and myself on stage at the conference.

One might consider that such a tweet follows a logic of consumption, as it allows its author to stage themself as a good anti-racist. However, from my perspective — namely the perspective of the subject whose critical thought is quoted and image exposed — the voicing of my reflections on a stage at a highly legitimate and attended public roundtable gave me the time and space to carry out my critique without interruption, and without my energy being immediately consumed for the service of hegemonic investments in innocence and racial entertainment. We could even interpret such a tweet as the proof that the anti-racism of Rohit and myself, at that event at least, had the performative power to counter-consume the do-gooder, by channelling their anti-racist moral concern towards the amplification of *our* analysis.

My story and its epilogue sheds light on two avenues for what I call "energetic resistance", namely the resistance against the consumption of and for the thriving of anti-racist energies.[84] First, the cautious design of the roundtable illustrates a strategic orientation towards the *condensation* of anti-racist energies. The conceiver of the roundtable had invited one keynote lecturer and four discussants – all of colour – and she had curated questions that would highlight the links between our views. By assembling us, and working on cultivating and connecting our voices with well-prepared and caring questions, the facilitator made our energies condensate by mutual inspiration, solidarity and nurturing. Such a condensation was further sustained by technologies of memorialization, namely by the audio-visual recording and open access diffusion of our interventions.

Second, the roundtable also illustrated a strategy of *safe spatio-temporal distancing*. The dominant liberal democratic model promotes proximity, namely face-to-face and synchronous co-presence between subjects who are in contention. Such a model depoliticizes the violent realities of meetings; indeed, as I have illustrated, proximate physical presence can serve the reproduction of power relations. The roundtable during which we expressed our anti-racist critique exemplifies an alternative form of encounter oriented towards the undoing of power asymmetries: the minoritized voices are given a stage, an enhanced and more visible space, as well as a lot of time before being interrupted. The audience is captive and expected to listen. Under such circumstances, political anti-racists' affects, bodies and discourses remain at a safe spatio-temporal distance, which sustains the thriving performativity of their voices, namely their ability to change racist consciences and conditions.

“Following documents around begins with an uncertainty about what these documents will do. They might, at certain points, even cause trouble.” By telling the story of a collective letter I contributed to, written some time ago, I hope to have re-opened its capacity to cause trouble. That is, to disrupt the conditions that enable humanitarians and other do-gooders to enjoy blackface at the expense of the subjects whose racialized bodies are mocked, and whose protests are consumed.

Preview Image Credit: @Boluca

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Dr. Noémi Michel is an activist, anti-racist and feminist scholar. She is a member of the European Race and Imagery Foundation (ERIF), as well as of the Collectif Faites des Vagues (based in Geneva). She is a senior lecturer in political theory at the Department of Political Science of the University of Geneva. Her research and teaching interests are in the areas of post-colonial and critical race theory, with a focus on diasporic Black feminist thought. Her recent work has been published in *Critical Horizons*, *Postcolonial studies* and *Social politics*. Her current research explores on the one hand conflicting grammars of anti-racism in European public debates and institutions, and on the other Black feminist theorization of political voice.

Footnotes

1. See for instance Patricia Purtschert, Barbara Lüthi and Francesca Falk, eds. *Postkoloniale Schweiz. Formen und Folgen eines Kolonialismus ohne Kolonien* (Bielefeld: Transcript, 2012); Patricia Purtschert and Harald Fischer-Tiné, eds. *Colonial Switzerland. Rethinking Colonialism From the Margins* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2015); Sushila Mesquita and Patricia Purtschert, "Gay Governance: Challenges to Coalition Building against Homophobia in Postcolonial Switzerland," in *Politiques De Coalition: Penser et se Mobiliser avec Judith Butler*, eds. Cynthia Kraus and Delphine Gardey (Zurich and Genève: Seismo, 2016); Bernhard Schär, *Tropenliebe: Schweizer Naturforscher und niederländischer Imperialismus in Südostasien um 1900* (Frankfurt and New York: Campus Verlag, 2015); Angela Sanders "'Wonderland' Peru: Migration and the Making of Andean Switzerland" in Purtschert and Fischer-Tiné, eds. *Colonial Switzerland.* ↩
2. See especially Patricia Purtschert, "The Return of the Native: Racialised Space, Colonial Debris and the Human Zoo," *Identities* 22, no. 4 (2014); Rohit Jain, "Die Comedyfigur Rajiv Prasad in Viktors Spätprogramm – (Post-)Koloniales Phantasma und die Krise des »Sonderfalls Schweiz«," in *Postkoloniale Schweiz; Formen und Folgen eines Kolonialismus ohnen Kolonien,* eds. Patricia Purtschert, Barbara Lüthi and Francesca Falk (Bielefeld: Transcript, 2012), 175–199; Jovita dos Santos Pinto, "Spuren: Eine Geschichte Schwarzer Frauen in der Schweiz," in *Terra Incognita? Der Treffpunkt Schwarzer Frauen in Zürich*, eds. Shelley Berlowitz, Elisabeth Joris and Zeedah Meierhofer-Mangeli (Zürich: Limmat Verlag, 2013). ↩
3. E-mail exchange from the author's archives, translation from German is mine. ↩
4. See for example: Judith Butler, *'Excitable Speech': A Politics of the Performative* (New York and London: Routledge, 1997); Sara Ahmed, *The Cultural Politics of Emotions (Edinburg:* Edinburgh

University Press, 2004); Shoshana Felman, *The Scandal of the Speaking Body: Don Juan with J.L. Austin or Seduction in Two Languages* (Stanford, CA.: Stanford University Press, 2002). ↩

5. John Langshaw Austin, "Lecture I," in *How to Do Things with Words: The William James Lectures Delivered at Harvard University in 1955* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1990). ↩

6. Sara Ahmed, "The Nonperformativity of Antiracism," *Meridians* 7, no. 1 (2006): 104. ↩

7. Ahmed, "The Nonperformativity," 105. ↩

8. Ibid. ↩

9. Halberstam quoted in Gloria Wekker, *White Innocence: Paradoxes of Colonialism and Race* (Durham, NC.: Duke University Press, 2016), 26. With the aim of accounting for white innocence in the Netherlands, Wekker defines such a methodology followingly: "[I use] insights from gender and sexuality studies, discourse and narrative analysis, post- and decolonial theory, and psychoanalysis. I work with interviews, watching TV and reading novels, analyzing e-mail correspondence, my own and others' experiences and organizational structures, rereading historical texts, and doing close readings of various kinds, to eventually and jointly be able to sketch a picture of the cultural archive, the dominant white Dutch self and its representation". Very similarly, my approach gathers literature and data of various forms in order to sketch an understanding of blackface and other racist public cultural practices' persistence. ↩

10. David Theo Goldberg, *The Threat of Race; Reflections on Racial Neoliberalism* (Maden, MA Oxford, Victoria: Wiley-Blackwell, 2009). ↩

11. Ilan Kapoor, *Celebrity Humanitarianism; the Ideology of Global Charity* (New York and London: Routledge, 2013), 13. ↩

12. My apprehension of consumption as something that burns, is inspired by Goldberg's critique of what he calls Europe's "precipitated evaporation" of race, namely post-war Europe's desire to see race disappear, which translates into colonial amnesia and the pervasive taboo to refer to race. My analysis of the manifold mechanisms that lead to consumption as evaporation is further indebted to Black Europeans' critical race interventions, see especially: Wekker, *White Innocence*; Fatima El-Tayeb, *European Others; Queering Ethnicity in Postnational Europe* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2011); Barnor Hesse, "Im/Plausible Deniability: Racism's Conceptual Double Bind," *Social Identities* 10, no.1 (2004). ↩

13. bell hooks, *Black Looks: Race and Representation* (Boston: South End Press, 1992), 32-33. ↩

14. Rohit Jain, Noémi Michel, Patricia Purtschert, Anne Lavanchy, Angela Sanders, Sushila Mesquita and Bernhard Schär, “Jetzt ist genug – Stop Blackfacing” / “Ca suffit – arrêtez le Blackfacing,” letter sent on the 1st of November 2012 to Amnesty International, Switzerland, Public Eye, FIMM, Gewählte Stimme, humanrights.ch, OSEO, Swiss Peace Council. I translated all the excerpts in this article from the French version. ↩
15. Goldberg, *The Threat of Race*. ↩
16. Ibid., 10. ↩
17. Ibid., 21. ↩
18. Rohit Barot, and John Bird, "Racialization: The Genealogy and Critique of a Concept," *Ethnic and Racial Studies* 24, no. 4 (2001): 613. ↩
19. Saidiya V. Hartman, *Scenes of Subjection. Terror, Slavery, and Self-Making in Nineteeth-Century America(*Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 1997), 51. See also Noémi Michel, “Accounts of Injury as Misappropriations of Race: Towards a Critical Black Politics of Vulnerability;” *Critical Horizons* 17, no. 2 (2016). ↩
20. Jain et al., “Jetzt ist genug.” ↩
21. Especially, the A.I. campaign seems to directly answer the SVP’s 1993 electoral campaign titled: “Now, it is enough, we Swiss are the N*”. Its use of blackface can be interpreted as answering back followingly: “It is Blocher and co who are the real n*”; ibid. ↩
22. Jain’s study on blackface in German Swiss TV comedy shows that humour and satire constitute sites where left and liberal actors can oppose political correctness, and express white fragility while denouncing blatant racism of the populist right-wing actors. Jain, "Die Comedyfigur.“ ↩
23. Jain et al., “Jetzt ist genug.” ↩
24. The letter also evokes previous A.I. campaigns that draw upon similar imageries and narratives of exceptionalism and innocence. For a detailed critique of another Swiss Amnesty International campaign, see Mesquita and Purtschert, “Gay Governance.” ↩
25. Jain et al., “Jetzt ist genug,”. ↩
26. Ahmed, “The Nonperformativity.” ↩
27. Goldberg, *The Threat of Race,* 21. ↩

28. Exploring a Swiss case offers an important laboratory for the analysis of the transformations and contradictions of racisms and anti-racisms in contemporary continental Europe. The Swiss context combines a unique conjuncture of humanitarianism (as the host country of the League of Nations, the Geneva Conventions, many international organizations and NGOs), neoliberalism (having one of the lowest tax levels in Europe and serving as an international financial hub) and its pioneering right-wing populism (which goes back to the 1960s with the notorious deportation referendums named after James Schwarzenbach). Switzerland, not only has a population with an immigrant background of approximately 40 percent — primarily recruited for labour and economic growth — at the same time, it has established one of the most restrictive naturalization laws. The anti-Muslim referendum on the ban of minarets and the racist image politics of the Swiss People's Party are copied and celebrated by extremist parties throughout Europe. ↩
29. Ahmed, "The Nonperformativity," 105. See also: Austin, *How to Do Things*. ↩
30. Those conventions and circumstances vary according to contexts and histories, as illustrated by the case of gay marriage. See: Sushila Mesquita, *Ban Marriage! Ambivalenzen der Normalisierung aus queer-feministischer Perspektive* (Vienna: Zaglossus, 2011). ↩
31. Goldberg, *The Threat of Race,* 158. ↩
32. "Racism" figures as one of the key words associated with the umbrella topic of "Discriminations" on the website of the Swiss section. See: "Discriminations", Amnesty International, accessed April 24, 2019, https://www.amnesty.ch/fr/themes/discriminations/discriminations. ↩
33. Harald Fischer-Tiné, "The Other Side of Internationalism: Switzerland as a Hub of Militant Anti-Colonialism, c. 1910-1920," in *Colonial Switzerland. Rethinking Colonialism from the Margins*, eds. Patricia Purtschert and Harald Fischer-Tiné (Basingstoke: Palgrave MacMillan, 2015). ↩
34. Étienne Balibar, "La Construction du Racisme," *Actuel Marx* 38, no. 2 (2005). ↩
35. Amnesty International, response email to the authors of the "Jetzt ist genug – stop Blackfacing", November 8, 2012. Translation from German is mine. ↩
36. My analysis of do-gooders' organizations is inspired by Barbara Applebaum, *Being White, Being Good; White Complicity, White Moral Responsibility, and Social Justice Pedagogy* (Plymouth, UK: Lexington Books, 2010), as well as by Corinne Lysandra Mason, "Tinder and Humanitarian Hook-Ups: The Erotics of Social Media Racism," *Feminist Media Studies* 16, no. 5 (2016). ↩
37. According to Kapoor ""charitainment' or 'politainment' – is a potent combination, bringing to international development the enormous resources and reach of ' star-power ' and the media." Kapoor, *Celebrity Humanitarianism*, 13. See also Mason, "Tinder." ↩

38. Mason, “Tinder,”; Kapoor, *Celebrity Humanitarianism*. ↩
39. It is however important to note that spectacularization is not a new communication strategy of charity and humanist organizations. ↩
40. Mason, “Tinder,” 824. ↩
41. Kapoor, *Celebrity Humanitarianism*, 83-92. ↩
42. Kirk Kristofferson, Katherine White and John Peloza, "The Nature of Slacktivism: How the Social Observability of an Initial Act of Token Support Affects Subsequent Prosocial Action," *Journal of Consumer Research* 40, no. 6 (2013): 1149. These authors further develop slacktivism's definition (1149): "the dramatic increase in social media presence among charitable organizations and advocacy groups, has made it increasingly easy for consumers to engage in small token acts of support for causes." Their research links increasing social observability to increasing engagement in token support opposed to what they call "meaningful support" to causes. ↩
43. Amnesty International, response email to the authors of the “Jetzt ist genug – stop Blackfacing.” ↩
44. Ibid. ↩
45. Do-gooder organizations’ blackface constitutes one instantiation of the constant renewal of the long history of racialization of non-white “others” within development, aid and cooperation discourses. See for instance Uma Kothari, “Critiquing ‘race’ and racism in development discourse and practice,” *Progress in Development Studies* 6, no. 1 (2006): 1–7. ↩
46. Wekker, *White Innocence*, 2. ↩
47. Véronique Mottier, "Narratives of National Identity: Sexuality, Race, and the Swiss ‘Dream of Order’," *Revue Suisse de Sociologie* 26, no. 3 (2000); Noémi Michel, "Sheepology: The Postcolonial Politics of Raceless Racism in Switzerland," *Postcolonial Studies* 18, no. 4 (2015). ↩
48. Wekker, *White Innocence*, 39. Note that Wekker uses the term “colorblind” in association with the Dutch sense of being “free from racism”. I deliberately avoid using this term for two reasons: first because it might imply that people do not see race, whereas they actually see race but pretend not seeing it; second, because the notion retains an ableist meaning. I therefore privilege the notions of “racelessness”, as coined by Goldberg, *The Threat of Race*. ↩
49. Wekker, *White Innocence*, 2. ↩
50. El-Tayeb, *European Others*, xvii. See also Goldberg, *The Threat of Race;* Egbert Alejandro Martina, "The Language of Racial Innocence," *Processed Life, November 16, 2013,*

https://processedlives.wordpress.com/2013/11/16/the-language-of-racial-innocence/. ↩

51. Switzerland did not have colonies of its own, however recent research has shown how political institutions and enterprises were not only accomplices in colonial economies including the slave trade, but how Swiss national identities were very much constructed in the transnational cultural sphere of white male supremacy. During the colonial period, racist practices like blackface in its many variants were present in advertisement, carnival and media culture in Swiss public space. These and other racist cultural techniques and institutions like human zoos, scientific racism or missionary humanitarianism flourished and allowed the Swiss public to identify with the colonial endeavour and with white supremacy. See for instance Patricia Purtschert, Francesca Falk and Barbara Lüthi, "Switzerland and 'Colonialism without Colonies'," *Interventions: International Journal of Postcolonial Studies* (2016); Michel, "Sheepology,"; dos Santos Pinto, "Spuren: Eine Geschichte." ↩

52. In the Swiss context, such denial often takes the form of an externalization: racism is an import of histories that took place elsewhere; anti-racism being thus consequently associated with an exaggerated demand for political correctness. The defense against accusations of racism, also qualifies such accusations as unfaithful — if not dangerous — attacks against freedom of expression and thus against democracy and fundamental human rights. Such a line of defence has even caused anti-racists to be accused of producing racism, because they brought the topic of race to the fore. See for instance, Noémi Michel, *Quand les mots et les images blessent: Postcolonialité, Égalité et Politique des actes de discours en Suisse et en France* (Université de Genève, 2014); Noémi Michel, "Racial Profiling und die Tabuisierung von 'rasse'," in *Racial Profiling; Struktureller rassismus und antirassistischer Widerstand*, eds. Mohamed Wa Baile, Serena O. Dankwa, Tarek Naguib, Patricia Purtschert and Sarah Schilliger (Bielefeld: Transkript Verlag, 2019). ↩

53. Amnesty International, response email to the authors of the "Jetzt ist genug – stop Blackfacing." ↩

54. Ibid. ↩

55. Charles W. Mills, "White Ignorance," in *Race and Epistemologies of Ignorance,* eds. S. Sullivan and N. Tuana, (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2007). ↩

56. Raymond William quoted in Wekker, *White Innocence,* 2. ↩

57. On performativity understood as an open-ended chain of reiteration, see also Butler, *'Excitable Speech'*. ↩

58. Amnesty International, response email to the authors of the "Jetzt ist genug – stop Blackfacing." ↩

59. Apart from A.I., three of the seven organizations having subscribed to "Enough" responded to our letters. All three reactions politely thanked us for our critique and expressed that they agreed

with some parts of the letter, but also reiterated their commitment to the campaign. ↩

60. In his reflections on the links between mobility and proximity, the famous mobility scholar John Urry re-visits the sociological literature on physical proximity going back to Georg Simmel. In this literature, physical proximity, especially in the case of "focused interactions known as 'meetings'" is predominantly positively associated with mutual attentiveness, trust and reciprocity. John Urry, "Mobility and Proximity," *Sociology* 36, no. 2 (2002): 259. ↩

61. hooks, *Black Looks,* 31. ↩

62. Ibid., 26. ↩

63. The three other authors of the letter who came to the meeting were one cis-man of colour and two white cis-women, one of them visibly pregnant. ↩

64. Although I read her as white, allow me to note that she told us after the meeting that her father was from South America. ↩

65. According to my first-hand observation, the spokesperson of this migrants' association took the opportunity of the meeting to be vocal about A.I.'s lack of democracy in the making of the campaign. As I focus on the clashes and power relations between divergent anti-racisms, restituting and analysing the few interventions of this third party during the meeting is beyond the scope of this article. ↩

66. I composed these vignettes on the basis of conversations with Rohit Jain, notes and recollections. They cannot be considered as entirely accurate and sole memories of the meeting, as they also carry the emotions and memories that emerged after the meeting, as I was trying to make sense of what had happened, as well as the emotions and memories accumulated during the process of writing this article. ↩

67. Wekker, *White Innocence,* 18. ↩

68. hooks, *Black Looks,* 28. ↩

69. Wekker, *White Innocence,* 166. ↩

70. Nelson quoted in Sherene H. Razack, "Stealing the Pain of Others: Reflections on Canadian Humanitarian Responses," *Review of Education, Pedagogy and Cultural Studies* 29, no. 4 (2007): 381. ↩

71. On the unequal politics of emotions implied by blackface practices, see also Karina Griffith, "Bankruptcy of Affect: Blackface in DIE UMZÜGE," in this special issue of *darkmatter Journal.* ↩

72. Martina, “Language.” ↩
73. Ibid. ↩
74. In *Scenes of Subjection*, Hartman analyses the stealing of Black pain in her account of abolitionists’ narratives of the pain of enslaved Black people. Razack re-deploys Hartman’s analysis in a critique of the massive outrage in Canada that followed the genocide of the Tutsies in Rwanda. She claims that consumptions of Black pain contribute to the formation of the Canadian national identity: "we have engaged in a peculiar process of consumption, one that is the synthesis to genuine outrage, and which amounts to what I call ‘stealing the pain of others’. I see this process as a national one. Believing ourselves to be citizens of a compassionate middle power who is largely uninvolved in the brutalities of the world, we have relied on these images and stories to confirm our own humanitarian character.” Razack, “Stealing the Pain,” 375-376. ↩
75. For a further theorization of the historical and political relevance of Black accounts of injury see Noémi Michel, "Equality and Postcolonial Claims of Discursive Injury," *Swiss Political Science Review* 19, no. 4 (2013); Michel, "Accounts of Injury.” ↩
76. My analysis of trivialization is inspired by Michel-Rolph Trouillot’s account of silencing in the production of historical narrative. Trouillot elaborates about the power to decide what is trivial in a particular description of events. He writes: “the triviality clause — for it is a clause, not an argument — forbids describing what happened from the point of view of some of the people who saw it happen or to whom it happened.” Michel-Rolph Trouillot, *Silencing the Past: Power and the Production of History* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1995), 115. ↩
77. Razack, “Stealing the Pain,” 376. ↩
78. Ibid., 387. ↩
79. For an analysis of the ways desires for exoneration from racism produce similar blockages and defensiveness in Western feminist movement, see Sarita C. Srivastava, "’You're Calling Me a Racist?’; the Moral and Emotional Regulation of Antiracism and Feminism," *Signs* 31, no. 1 (2005). ↩
80. One can find many examples of a European mobilization against blackface in the other contributions to this special issue for *darkmatter Journal*. ↩
81. Goldberg, *The Threat of Race,* 21 - my emphasis. ↩
82. Ibid. ↩

83. See Gurminder Bhambra, Noémi Michel, Rohit Jain, Felipe Polanía and Bilgin Ayata, “Rassismus, Kolonialismus, Demokratie,” published February 10, 2017 from the Reclaim Democracy Plenum at the Universität Basel, video, 2:27:50, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=HAcDiYqa28g. ↩

84. These final remarks around the space and form of energetic resistance have been inspired by Catherine Squire's analysis of the counter-public, by Kristie Dotson's work on epistemic violence and justice, as well as by Vanessa Eileen Thompson's analysis of Black spatial politics. See: Catherine R. Squires, "Rethinking the Black Public Sphere: An Alternative Vocabulary for Multiple Public Spheres," *Communication Theory* 12, no. 4 (2002); Kristie Dotson, "Tracking Epistemic Violence, Tracking Practices of Silencing," *Hypatia* 26, no. 2 (2011); Vanessa E. Thompson, "Decolonizing City Spaces and Images. Black Collective Solidarity and Conviviality in Paris," in *darkmatter Journal,* vol. 15 (2020). ↩