

Wake up, Almany!

- Germany's political will to ignore institutional racism

A Centre for Feminist Foreign Policy Briefing

This document contains vocabulary, photos, and topics which could lead to racial trauma. We encourage our BIPOC readers to discuss the content of this briefing in safe(r) spaces.

The Issue

At the Centre for Feminist Foreign Policy (CFFP), we understand that the political normalisation and continuing democratic legitimisation of racism are pressing issues. CFFP believes that foreign policy is a mechanism for equality, justice, solidarity, and peace, based on an intersectional feminist framework that rethinks security with a human-centred approach at its core. Along with other feminist organisations, we have signed the "Statement of Solidarity to End Systemic Racism in Foreign Policy"¹ initiated by Women of Color Advancing Peace and Security. We believe that this initiative is imperative. Racism extends to actors leading and working within politics and political institutions themselves. In many democratic states, including Germany, the existence of racism within political institutions is often denied. CFFP believes that feminism and anti-racism are inseparable, and governments must urgently employ an intersectional feminist approach to tackle institutional racism in its security structures.² This is directly linked to our mission to pave the way for a Feminist Foreign Policy with human security at its core. This briefing introduces measures states should adopt in law and policy to ensure the unlearning and dismantling of institutional patterns that lead to (un)intended racist and marginalising practices.

"There is no such thing as a single-issue struggle because we do not live single-issue lives."

• **Audre Lorde**

I. Feminism must be anti-racist to meet the demands of our time

Audre Lorde's words inspire the feminist values that CFFP upholds and strives to promote. Patriarchy and white supremacy are interconnected systems of oppression, and one cannot be eradicated without the other.³ Therefore, the call for a Feminist Foreign Policy must be anti-racist. The status quo of (Feminist) Foreign Policy does not correspond with making the lives of Black, Indigenous and People of Colour (BIPOC) safer. Historically, many public policies often render BIPOC insecure, and if policy-makers continue to ignore intersecting forms of discrimination, they actively contribute to systemic oppression enforced by institutions. As feminists, we recognise that to address the complexities of structurally-endured injustices on a domestic and global level, foreign policy must put an intersectional understanding of (in)securities at its core.⁴ This is also the case for establishing a Feminist Foreign Policy for Germany which must involve: divestment from power and privilege as well as unlearning and relearning the histories of colonialism, and the constructed hierarchisation of *race* in Germany's political institutions.

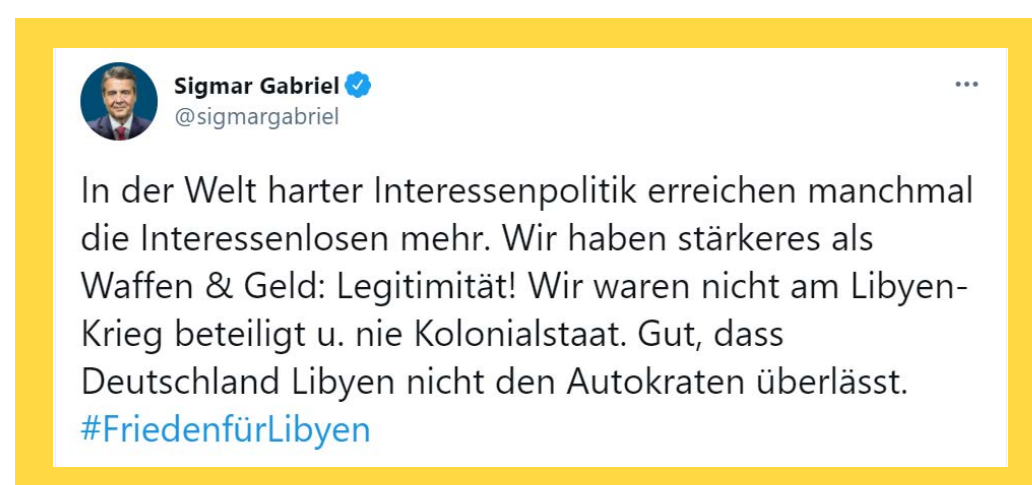
II. Germany's colonial amnesia proves dangerous for its present and future

Germany's political ignorance of institutionalised racism is strongly rooted in the nation's historical neglect of its politicisation of *race* decades before the Nazi regime came to power. Emilia Roig, Founder and Executive Director of the Center for Intersectional Justice, refers to this historical neglect as "Germany's selective amnesia" and further posits that this amnesia contributes to dismissing and rebuking the salience of *race* as an ideological, political and social concept".⁵ Germany's colonial amnesia becomes apparent in the limited self-awareness of Germany's role as an active driver of colonialism and the dehumanisation of non-white bodies.⁶ One example of Germany's colonial era is the Berlin Conference of 1884, initiated by the country's first chancellor Otto von Bismarck. It was a key event in global colonial history. Representatives from fourteen countries and empires met to violently force themselves on the Global South,⁷ which, amongst many cruelties, enabled the genocide in Namibia ordered by the German state. Upon further examination of Germany's colonial past, it becomes evident how political institutions have instrumentalised women's empowerment for realising security policies. According to the Cultural Anthropologist Jacqueline Mayen, German white women were sent to the German colonies as bearers of German culture.⁸ For example, the Women's League of the German Colonial Society, founded in 1908, was one of the largest colonial societies at the time. Around 19,000 women were members, and over 145 offices were established.⁹ Through their work in the Women's League of the German Colonial Society, white German women at home and abroad contributed to a racist hierarchisation of people during Germany's colonial era. Women's initiatives, like the Women's League of the German Colonial Society, were running under the umbrella of delivering progress and civilisation to the Global South. These initiatives mirror the extent to which instrumentalisation of gender was a crucial part of Germany's domestic and foreign strategy to pursue a racist political agenda as a colonial power. An example of how colonial policies¹⁰ had an impact on domestic policy is the forced sterilisation of Black children in the West of Germany. After Germany's defeat in World War I and the decolonisation process mandated in the Treaty of Versailles (1919), the German government began to register so-called "Rhineland children" in 1923 with the objective to sterilise them later. These Black German children were defamed as "bastards" and, for government officials, they represented a visible result of defeat in the war. They were perceived as a threat that needed to be erased.¹¹ This is an example of *Othering* Black Germans, which continued until the end of the Nazi regime and has not been even remotely adequately addressed since then. In 2019, German scholars Prof Fatima El-Tayeb and Dr Vanessa Eileen Thompson highlighted that Germany's security units have institutionalised the colonial practice of *Othering* non-white bodies.¹² In practice, this includes border control security checks but also street patrols where BIPOC are often identified as non-German, as foreign. The dominant understanding of Germanness complies with a certain set of characteristics¹³ deeply rooted in its unprocessed colonial hierarchisation of *race* that Germany has yet to overcome. Both examples are not well known in Germany and illustrate the limited awareness of Germany's role as an active driver of colonial politics. Moreover, both colonial practices describe instances of *Othering* that Germany has failed to address. The consequence of this inaction is that non-white people are still *Othered* in Germany.

There are a few attempts from the German government to address its colonial past and move towards a decolonial future, for example with the current Federal Cultural Foundation's "Dekoloniale Programme",¹⁴ the launch of the "German Contact Point for Collections from Colonial Contexts,"¹⁵ and the "International Conference: Colonialism as Shared History. Past, Present, Future".¹⁶ However, the late political discussion about Germany's colonial past is a missed opportunity to tackle Germany's historical hierarchisation of *race*. Moreover, it is a missed opportunity to understand the significant interdependencies between the German colonial state, the Nazi regime and the normalisation of racism in politics today.

III. Germany's political ignorance reproduces (neo-)colonialism in foreign policy

Germany's ignorance of its colonial history is embedded in the way it understands its domestic and foreign policy. Public policy fails to address the implications of such history on both the domestic and foreign policy levels. The political consequences of ignoring Germany's colonial past become particularly visible in the German self-perception as a global peacebuilder. Today, Germany presents itself as a mediator and global peace power. However, the nation's leaders continue to neglect Germany's role in producing global imbalances created through a systematic and continuous devaluation of those deemed *Other*. Prof E. Tendayi Achiume, the United Nations Human Rights Council's fifth Special Rapporteur on Contemporary Forms of Racism, Racial Discrimination, Xenophobia and Related Intolerance, highlights in her essay "Putting Racial Equality Onto the Global Human Rights Agenda" that "leaders in the highest level of political office in countries that have long viewed themselves as the vanguard of liberal constitutional democracy openly profess racist and xenophobic views as they adopt policies that entrench them".¹⁷ Germany's role as a global promoter of democracy and human rights opens itself to this critique. Hence, it is not enough to promote human rights policies if the individuals designing these policies do not embrace anti-racist approaches. Instead of countering Germany's political normalisation of racist behaviour, high-level politicians keep contributing to the selective colonial amnesia. The lack of political sensibility of Germany's colonial past became evident when former Foreign Minister Sigmar Gabriel (from 2017 to 2018) tweeted at the "Berlin International Conference on Libya" in 2020:



"In a world with hard interest politics, those without interests can sometimes reach more. We have more than weapons and money: legitimacy! [...] [Germany has] never been a colonial state [...]".¹⁸ Even if the former Foreign Minister's tweet referred to the fact that Germany has not had a colonial administration in Libya, it is a fact that Germany has been a colonial state officially from 1884 to the end of World War I. The political ignorance demonstrated by the Foreign Minister exemplifies Roig's "colonial amnesia". If Germany seeks to realise a foreign policy in line with the political realities of the past and the present, it must be informed by an understanding of the nation's colonial past. Another layer to Germany's role globally, coupled with its neglect to effectively acknowledge colonial assumptions, is Germany's approach to the Marshall Plan with Africa since 2017. Despite the strong call for a paradigm shift by the Minister of Development Gerd Müller and his emphasis that "African ownership must be strengthened and the days of 'aid' and of 'donors and recipients' [are] put behind us",¹⁹ the potential of African diaspora living in Germany as a critical driver for the realisation of this development plan remains overlooked by policy-makers. Decolonisation is a collective and participatory process that requires people to face the (un)intended consequences of racist assumptions. Though it is difficult, it is crucial and necessary. Thus far, Germany has failed to decolonise its political institutions and continues to not recognise people of African descent in Germany as suitable actors for economic and political growth. This presents a case of how the *Othering* of People of African Descent hinders the realisation of Germany's foreign policies. The widespread ignorance of Germany's colonial past, its effects on the present, and the lack of awareness from German leaders have (un)intended consequences for Germany's role in current global politics. By taking a leading role in unlearning harmful practices from its colonial past, a powerful democracy like Germany has the potential to tackle institutional racism in foreign policy and on a domestic level, and contribute to anti-racist domestic and foreign structures, which will consequently enable an intersectional feminist approach to policy, domestic and foreign.

IV. Racism is not just a foreign issue

When racism is discussed within Germany's political discourse, it is often perceived as an issue that has to be tackled in other countries like the U.S. Nevertheless, Germany's political ignorance towards its shortcomings and responsibility to fight racism within its own country has been on display since the end of World War II in 1945. Severe instances of racist interactions have been met with a critical lack of response from officials, further alienating those affected. For example, migrant and refugee communities continue to remember the racist attacks of Rostock-Lichtenhagen, where Roma and Vietnamese were targeted.²⁰ Security forces failed to protect the targeted communities even though there had been evidence of plans days prior to the attacks. Violence spilt over to other cities in the form of attacks on asylum centres, immigrants' housing and racialised neighbourhoods. Among BIPOC, these attacks presented a collective shock and, at the same time, were a violent wake-up call that racism in Germany exists and that there is a lack of protection towards marginalised groups. Decades later, the collective shock re-emerged by the murders committed by the neo-Nazi terror group National Socialist Underground (NSU) (2000–2007),²¹ the antisemitic attack in Halle (October 2019),²² and the most recent racially-motivated terror attack in Hanau (February 2020).²³ All attacks revealed the dimension of right-wing terrorism and extremism in Germany and they have shed light on the extent of discriminatory behaviour as a structural procedure within Germany's law enforcement. Put simply, racism is not only a foreign issue – racism does exist in Germany.

i. Right-Wing Extremism and Terrorism: The NSU Complex

The murders perpetrated by the neo-Nazi terrorist network NSU are arguably the most significant known cases of terrorism in Germany after 1945. The core trio consisted of three neo-Nazis, two men and one woman. The complete vastness of the network remains unknown. In total, ten people were killed between 2000 and 2007, including individuals with Turkish, Kurdish, Greek backgrounds and a white policewoman. During each NSU murder follow-up, police investigators criminalised the PoC victims. The investigators of the NSU murders first framed the murders as clan disputes and called the investigation after the strait of Istanbul, Bosphorus. Based on racist stereotypes, this decision had prevented an adequate and, most importantly, unbiased investigation. Instead of following leads which indicated racist-motivated killings, the investigators were convinced that the murders were linked to drugs or money laundering and even conducted interviews with relatives and friends in Turkey. This pattern of institutionalised racism executed by white security actors follows the criminalisation of men of Colour in Germany.²⁴ The extent of racist patterns keeps reproducing themselves during the whole NSU process. Until today, memorial monuments for the victims have been denied, for example in Cologne where a nail bomb attack injured twenty-two people in 2004. Although the communities affected by the NSU attacks repeatedly requested to reduce the state's 120 years embargo on the documents, it took the murder of the white male politician Walter Lübcke to reduce the embargo of the documents to 2044. Walter Lübcke was murdered for his "refugee-friendly" politics in 2019, the first murder of this kind in recent German history.²⁵

Confronting acts of violence resulting from institutional racism requires an uncomfortable process for white people in power because for social change to happen, uncomfortable questions must be asked and acted upon. This is imperative because discriminatory practices by the state represent a threat to Germany's democracy itself. If Germany continues to neglect its historic contribution to the colonisation of the Global South and ignores the institutional racism in its domestic policies, it will not be able to investigate the extent current structures are inherited from the past failed ones.

V. Institutional racism is a threat to Germany's democracy

The UN's Special Rapporteur on Contemporary Forms of Racism continues to emphasise racial inequalities are a threat to all democracies.²⁶ Nonetheless, racism in Germany is rarely understood as a threat to its democracy. Racist behaviour within German institutions is often portrayed "first and foremost as an aggregate of individual, interpersonal and intentional acts".²⁷ The truth is that racism in Germany is structurally rooted in its public institutions. Institutional racism refers to the practices within and across institutions that (un)intentionally reproduce racist patterns. Understanding racism as embedded solely on an individual level has led to the common practice of neglecting institutional racism in Germany's democratic branch of law enforcement. During the Black Lives Matter protests 2020 in Germany, civil society advocated strongly for a study on racial profiling in Germany. However, the German Minister Federal Minister of the Interior, Building and Community, Horst Seehofer, refused to conduct a study on racial profiling within the German police. According to the Ministry, this decision was based on the fact that "racial profiling is forbidden and therefore does not exist".²⁸ Racial profiling is often based on external characteristics such as skin colour, characteristics, or symbols perceived as non-white and non-Christian. For example, in 2019, a group of men of Colour were stopped by the German police in Cologne on their way to celebrate Eid al-Fitr, a celebration marking the end of Ramadan. According to the police, they were reacting to a situation "that makes people afraid", which may present "considerable danger".²⁹ However, the police's framing of a perceived non-white cultural tradition as a dangerous threat to society did not result in any significant repercussions for the German police. The massive *Othering* suggests that the German police's reference point for a non-risk person continues to be white, Christian Germans. Everything that deviates from this reference point is treated by different standards, in this case as a security risk. As a result, racial profiling as a security practice of *Othering* is deeply internalised by institutions, widely accepted and not understood as a threat to an equal, democratic society.

ii. Racial Profiling: The "Nafri" Case

In 2016, the common practice of the German Police to describe men of Colour "looking North African" as "Nafris" became public because the police itself has used this term for internal and external communication.³⁰ Using this derogative term and heavy policing has been a political response after numerous cases of sexualised violence during the New Year's celebrations 2015/16 in Cologne and other cities.³¹ Additionally, the political discourse regarding law enforcement has shifted heavily into a racist narrative. This was based on the racist assumption that men of Colour associated with Islam are a threat to white women. However, this is problematic as it manifests a white, Christian-based, and Eurocentric understanding of security and cultures that blatantly ignores its own embedded shortcomings in gender equality. Sexism is not an imported issue but has always been part of German society. In their nation-wide campaign #ausnahmslos, critical feminist voices in Germany like Gizem Adiyaman, Emine Aslan, Keshia Fredua-Mensah, and CFFP Co-founder Kristina Lunz have warned against putting sexualised violence on the political agenda only when the perpetrators are perceived, positioned, and constructed as *Others* and regarded as *non-Germans*.³² Journalists, like Mohamed Amjahid, continue to illustrate the extensive dimension of institutionalised racism on all levels within the German police force. Amjahid has publicly criticised the reproduction of gendered racism embedded in the education of the German police force. For example, the book "Understanding and Investigating Turkish and Arab People" published by the Publishing House for Police Science reproduces the racist stereotype of 'Turkish and Arab' men not being able to express themselves.



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Book cover :
"Understanding and Investigating Turkish and Arab People"

iii. Death in Custody: The Oury Jalloh Case

In 2005, the burnt body of Black asylum-seeker Oury Jalloh from Sierra Leone was found in a German jail cell after he was taken into custody. He allegedly harassed two women while under the influence of drugs. State officials claimed that he had taken his own life by igniting his fire-safe mattress with a lighter while cuffed to it with his hands and feet. However, the International Independent Commission, which investigated Oury Jalloh's death, claims that the evidence suggests that the police force murdered him. The medical report commissioned by the family of Jalloh indicated several bones were fractured before he died, suggesting he sustained significant violence before his death.³⁴ Moreover, police investigations could not answer why the fire was not discovered by the police and why the fire alarm had been ignored or disengaged. It was also unclear where Jalloh had acquired the lighter, and police could not immediately produce the lighter as evidence. Despite the fact that most of the evidence has been identified as inadmissible and systemic failures from law enforcement, the federal investigation was closed in 2020.³⁵ Dr Vanessa Thompson was part of the International Independent Commission to investigate Oury Jalloh's death. She criticises that the German state upholds the constant criminalisation of Oury Jalloh instead of investigating his murder. In Oury Jalloh's case, the protection of women from non-white men has been instrumentalised and used to justify violence executed by law enforcement. This pattern of institutionalised racism executed by white security actors follows the hyper-masculinisation of Black bodies.

VI. The hierarchisation of (in)securities is a harmful practice

Across the whole party spectrum in Germany, political discourse is geared towards heavy policing and controlling minorities. Yet, the protection of minorities from discriminatory practices executed by law enforcement remains unprioritised.³⁶ The institutionalised racism within German law enforcement implies that the security of white people tends to be prioritised over the security of BIPOC in German politics.³⁷ This lack of protection of minorities is a problem in a country that portrays itself as a democracy pushing for human rights on a global stage. It is disingenuous - the nation is more eager to address inequality abroad than look within. It also shows a lack of credibility because the nation is imbuing hypocritical behaviour.

Whiteness is the set norm, and security structures are deliberately designed to safeguard those who ascribe to this enshrined norm.³⁸ This prioritisation amplifies the marginalisation of BIPOC perspectives in terms of their security. As a consequence, security risks specific to BIPOC are rarely of interest to political actors in Germany although civil society keeps pointing to a strong connection of the German state apparatus to influential right-wing extremists like the Ku Klux Klan or close ties to the NSU network.³⁹ In the summer of 2020, several public figures received threats, signed "NSU 2.0", signalling fanware and revival of the NSU which indicates the right-wing extremist motivation behind those threats. A month's long investigation of the incident led to the discovery that several Frankfurt police officers had shared people's personal data with those behind the hate messages.⁴⁰ These cases involved mainly women that either have a migration history or who actively speak out in favour of migration and against racism like the comedian Idil Baydar. Within the same year, journalists discovered that the former Minister for Interior Affairs of Mecklenburg-Western Pomerania, Lorenz Caffier, had purchased a gun in 2018 from someone with suspected links to the far-right group Nordkreuz.⁴¹ Despite the minister's political mandate to oversee all police and intelligence operations against right-wing groups, he denied having any knowledge about the purchaser's ties to a far right-group. These are examples of German security institutions not having appropriately scrutinised their embedded racist behaviours. Furthermore, they have perpetuated such practices by actively demonstrating willful ignorance. Democracies are meant to serve and protect all members of society. The various racist incidents raise the question: whose security does the German state protect?

In 2014, the director of the European Network Against Racism, Michaël Privot, called Germany's lack of protection of minorities in the context of specific discriminatory patterns "an obsession with the securitisation of Muslim communities"⁴². A recent example of this "obsession" was mirrored shortly after the Hanau terrorist attack in 2020. The police reached out to the victims and survivors' families to ensure they were not planning acts of revenge or retaliation.⁴³ The extent to which the German security apparatus identifies non-white people in Germany as potential threats and deems BIPOC neighbourhoods dangerous has become more evident in December 2020. Journalists revealed that the father of the Hanau terrorist subscribes to the same racist belief system as his son and poses a potential threat to those in his immediate environment.⁴⁴ For example, the father of the deceased terrorist has officially filed a complaint against the memorial sites, and has asked for the return of the murder weapon his son used to kill his victims. However, none of the family members of the victims who are still living close to the father were informed, nor are they currently receiving specific protection. The lack of protection requires examining how much more exposure to racist violence is tolerated by the German law enforcement.

In 2021, the political normalisation of racism has reached a point where it presents a threat to Germany's democracy. In particular, the numerous cases of neglecting institutional racism in Germany's law enforcement have revealed that Germany's democracy is facing systemic failure when it comes to the fight against racism. This systemic failure manifests itself in racial profiling (i), death in custody (ii) or right-wing extremism and terrorism (iii). Due to the political ignorance towards racist patterns, the actual dimension of institutional racism in Germany remains unknown. Despite the lack of official statistics, various examples show that institutional racism is a reality in Germany. Therefore, it is necessary to employ an intersectional analysis of the existing cases to prevent the normalisation of racism, the hierarchisation of (in)securities, and Germany's colonial amnesia in the future. Hence, it is a democracy's responsibility to unlearn and dismantle practices that reproduce racism, and lead by example.

**“In a racist society,
it is not enough to be non-racist,
we must be anti-racist.”**

Angela Y. Davis

VII. CFFP's Demands for the German Elections 2021

Racism is not simply perpetrated by an individual. It is deeply ingrained into our systems. If the German government wants to genuinely uphold its democratic principles, it can no longer ignore the harmful impact of institutionalised racism in its own security ranks. Political institutions must actively address all forms of racism. Our demands are centred around the following solution-driven approaches for governmental bodies and officials:

Understanding of racism as a threat to democracy

- Expand the planned study by the Federal Ministry of the Interior, Building and Community on the daily life within the police force by conducting a separate study on racial profiling and seek advice from the expertise of the civil society groups affected.
- Create an evidence-based database illustrating how the gendered dimension of terrorism and extremism is being tackled within the Federal Office for the Protection of the Constitution (Verfassungsschutz).
- Ensure that an independent expert group tasked with developing an EU Code of Police Ethics is created, as mandated by the European Commission following the anti-racism protests in June 2020.

Strengthening accountability mechanisms

- Adjust existing anti-racism laws for all institutions involved in law enforcement.
- Ensure that politicians face legal consequences and lose their mandate when affiliated with racist networks and their members.
- Appoint an objective external police commissioner with a legal mandate in all states and at the federal level to ensure that structures are critically observed and questioned at all times.
- Revise the National Action Plan Against Racism (2018) to incorporate an intersectional legal approach and add measurable indicators of progress.

Securing sustainable funding

- Provide institutional funding for governmental bodies to realise the UN's Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination, in particular regarding the General recommendation No. 36 (2020) on preventing and combating racial profiling by law enforcement officials adopted on the 24th of November 2020.
- Contribute significant funding for the EU justice, rights and values fund, for which funding decreased significantly in the revised multiannual financial framework proposals of the Commission.
- Reduce institutional barriers within grant applications for community-based projects working with survivors of right-wing crimes.
- Secure legal funds for BIPoC initiatives and Human Rights Defenders to ensure legal protection against further hate crimes.

Learn More

- *Amnesty International and the Open Society Initiative for Europe. A Human Rights Guide for Researching Racial and Religious Discrimination in Counterterrorism in Europe. 2020.*
- *Aysun Bademsoy. Spuren - Die Opfer des NSU. Documentary by Aysun Bademsoy. 2020.*
- *Statement by the German Comedian Idil Baydar. 2020.*
- *Center for Intersectional Justice and the Gunda Werner Institut. Reaching Everyone on the Planet... . Kimberlé Crenshaw. 2019.*
- *List of people who have died in custody in Germany by Death in Custody.*
- *Semra Ertan. Mein Name ist Ausländer | Benim Adım Yabancı. Poem. 2020.*
- *European Network Against Racism (ENAR). 2014-2018 ENAR Shadow Report on racist crime and institutional racism in Europe. 2019.*
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