# "Let brothers not fight!": Youth work and nationalist ideologies among young migrants in Europe

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*Abstract*
Right-wing parties and ideologies are gaining more and more importance in European societies. Racist ideologies are functional on the one hand to regulate the labor market and social services, on the other hand to mobilize the masses for neoliberal transformations. People in the European migration, as victims of racist ideologies, develop different ways of dealing with discrimination in the absence of strong anti-fascist political structures. A current phenomenon among young migrants is a "long-distance nationalism" through which they construe themselves in the position of power in a distant country, while staying away from mainstream politics in the country where they live. This discusses this issue using an example from Vienna. In 2020, Turkish nationalists attacked a Kurdish rally in Favoriten, a working-class district of Vienna. For three days, there was an extraordinary state of affairs in the district with heavy police deployment. We, as a group of youth workers, developed a film project on the subject together with young people who were involved in the clashes in various forms. This example shows how youth social work can reflect together with young people on their reasons for acting and bring about a change in stereotypical actions. The article concludes by explaining some important working principles in (psycho-) social work with young people who tend towards right-wing ideologies.

*Keywords*
racism, right-wing ideologies among migrants, youth social work

In June 2020, a Kurdish information booth in Favoriten, the 10th district of Vienna, fell victim to an attack orchestrated by Turkish nationalists. The booth, originally set up as a protest against violence against women, sought to highlight the plight of Kurdish activists and female freedom fighters who had lost their lives at the hands of the Turkish military forces. Adorned with numerous Kurdish symbols, the booth was perceived by Turkish nationalists as a platform for the Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK), the Kurdish guerrilla organization engaged in conflict with the Turkish state.

As the organizers sought refuge within the premises of a left-wing association in the previously occupied Ernst Kirchweger House (EKH), a swarm of attackers swiftly converged on the EKH, where windows were shattered, and attempts were made to set the building ablaze. The following day witnessed a demonstration against the assaults on both the information booth and the EKH, organized by anti-fascists and Kurdish activists. Regrettably, this demonstration also became a target for aggression by Turkish nationalists, resulting in several arrests, vehicular destruction, and widespread criticism directed at the police during three days of tumultuous demonstrations, counter-demonstrations, and law enforcement operations ("Erneut Angriff Grauer Wölfe," 2020). The majority of the assailants were male adolescents and young adults who were either not born in Austria or had parents born outside the country. However, their ethnic backgrounds were not exclusively Turkish; among them were individuals identifying as Afghan, Arab, Chechen, Albanian, or even Kurdish.

These incidents spurred a media and political discourse in Austria on the integration of "migrants" into Austrian society. The Turkish Federation in Austria, supported by the Nationalist Movement Party (MHP) – the prominent fascist party in Turkey – distanced itself from the attack on its Facebook page, urging its members to adhere to Austrian laws. Nevertheless, Austrian media and politicians attributed the assault to the Grey Wolves, the militant wing of the MHP, which was notorious for targeting leftist activists and intellectuals during the 1970s and, in recent decades, for participating in attacks against Kurdish activists. Notably, some participants in the attacks were unequivocally aligned with the Grey Wolves or their symbols, as evidenced by the display of Turkish flags, the "wolf salute," which has been banned in Austria since the right-wing ÖVP-FPÖ coalition, and the chanting of "Allahu akbar."

Central to the discussion was the speculation about potential direct influence from Turkey (Scherndl, 2020), where the MHP holds a key position in the government while the primary partner, Erdogan's Justice and Development Party (AKP), progressively integrates Turkish nationalism into its political agenda. It is a well-established fact that some members of Turkish ruling parties or high-ranking Turkish bureaucrats maintain ties with far-right and criminal organizations in Europe, such as *Osmanen Germania* (Fischhaber & Klasen, 2018). These groups are utilized to intimidate dissenting intellectuals or journalists ("Türkischer Journalist Erk Acarer," 2021) and function as agents of the Turkish "deep state" within the Turkish and Kurdish diaspora in Europe.

However, these connections do not fully elucidate why nationalist ideology exerts such a profound influence in the diaspora or how hundreds of young people aged 13-21 can mobilize rapidly through social networks in a European capital. Presenting these young individuals as part of a tightly organized fascist organization under Turkey's control oversimplifies the issue, obscuring the fact that we are grappling not only with a political matter, but also a social one.

Nationalism and nationalist ideologies are prevalent themes in youth work within German-speaking countries. Right-wing parties find substantial support among young people who do not identify as "migrants," while many young individuals with "migration background" place significant emphasis on their

national identity, often describing themselves as "proud Turks," "proud Albanians," "proud Serbs," and so forth on Instagram.

In this article, my focus will be on young people with a "migration background" who strongly emphasize their national identity. To commence, I will delve into the link between racism in the neoliberal age and tangible power dynamics in society. This connection between racism and actual social relations leads me to posit a crucial distinction between nationalist and racist ideologies among members of privileged and diasporic groups. These phenomena are not synonymous, and likewise, nationalist and racist political attitudes exhibit distinct dynamics and functions within the diaspora and in positions of privilege within power relations. Therefore, I contend that nationalist and racist political attitudes in the diaspora merit separate consideration, to be understood solely in the context of the prevailing social conditions in each country. It is therefore misleading and reductionist to equate nationalism in privileged groups with nationalism in the diasporic group, and similarly, nationalism in the diasporic group with nationalism in the so-called "homeland." To elucidate this phenomenon, I will draw upon Benedict Anderson's concept of "long-distance nationalism" (Anderson 1998, pp. 58).

Following this theoretical foundation, the second part of this article will showcase the video project "Let brothers not fight!" from Vienna. This project involved collaboration with young individuals exhibiting Turkish nationalist tendencies, some of whom actively participated in the 2020 riots in Vienna's 10th district, while others were keenly interested, but refrained from direct involvement for various reasons. This project served as a unique opportunity for these young individuals to articulate and elucidate their motivations, especially at a time when politicians and the media were extensively discussing the youth demonstrators. Based on this project, I identify three functions of nationalist ideologies within diasporic youth groups and discuss fundamental pedagogical stances in critical psychology-oriented work with nationalist youth in the diaspora. In the final section of the article, I will offer reflections on the intersection of social work with racist or nationalist ideologies, particularly within the context of a racist social system.

## A terminological explanation

In delving into the term "diaspora" throughout this article, I am cognizant of its religious undertones, particularly its historical association with the Jewish diaspora. Within the realm of migration studies, however, the term has evolved to encompass a broader significance. William Safran (1991, pp. 5) outlines six shared characteristics among diasporic groups:

> 1) they, or their ancestors, have been dispersed from a specific original 'center' to two or more 'peripheral,' or foreign, regions; 2) they retain a collective memory, vision, or myth about their original homeland—its physical location, history, and achievements; 3) they believe that they are not—and perhaps cannot be—fully accepted by their host society and therefore feel partly alienated and insulated from it; 4) they regard their ancestral homeland as their true, ideal home and as

the place to which they or their descendants would (or should) eventually return—when conditions are appropriate; 5) they believe that they should, collectively, be committed to the maintenance or restoration of their original homeland and to its safety and prosperity; and 6) they continue to relate, personally or vicariously, to that homeland in one way or another, and their ethnocommunal consciousness and solidarity are importantly defined by the existence of such a relationship.

Using this definition, Safran speaks of the Armenian, Maghrebian, Turkish, Palestinian, Cuban, Greek, and Chinese diasporas of the present, and the Polish diaspora of the past, although none of them quite fit the "ideal type" of Jewish diaspora (Safran, 1991, p. 6). Robin Cohen (2008, p. 6) also embraces this list with slight adjustments.

Given that my article centers on young people originating from Turkey and other predominantly Muslim-populated countries, Safran's identified commonalities prove particularly useful, because, as Safran also emphasizes, these shared characteristics can be easily recognized among a large part of guest workers from Turkey and their children. However, it is crucial to acknowledge the potential criticism of differentiating between young individuals labeled as "migrants" and those deemed "non-migrants," as this may inadvertently reinforce a racist dichotomy. Many of these young people were born in Austria (or Germany) or have grown up there, with a significant number holding Austrian citizenship. Labeling them as "foreigners" or part of a diaspora group may be deemed racist, implying that their true home lies elsewhere.

As I will elaborate further, this distinction is rooted in the legal and racist interventions of the nation-state in society. Yet, we must recognize the colonialist conditions within European metropolises as an undeniable reality. While certain groups are subjected to being "migrantified" by the nation-state, their relationship with privileged groups becomes a dual and inherently contradictory post-racist exclusion. On one hand, there is a fervent desire for equal rights with Austrians/Germans/Europeans. On the other hand, being identified with these privileged groups is perceived as an affront. The bolstering of identification with an imaginary and many times idealized "homeland" and groups originating from this "homeland" or similar places stems from the aspiration to differentiate from the "selfish," "racist," and "snooty" colonialists. Identifying as Austrian or German is only considered in terms of equality and directed towards the privileged groups. Conversely, aligning with the group of colonialist Europeans or resembling "them" is regarded as shameful. This is precisely why the term "diaspora group" aptly characterizes these groups. This distinction is not merely externally imposed by privileged groups or the nation-state; it is also internalized by groups excluded from social resources due to the prevailing racist and colonialist circumstances, serving the purposes of cohesion and resistance.

## Institutionalization of racism by the nation-state

As highlighted earlier, the efficacy of racist discourse is contingent upon the intervention of the modern nation-state, which furnishes it with a tangible

political and legal foundation. Étienne Balibar contends that, without this state intervention that links specific rights to citizenship, all national or pseudo-national minorities would remain virtual and lack legal substance (Balibar 1992, pp. 18).

The political strategy inherent in racist discourse typically seeks to regulate, on one hand, those engaged in the most unwanted jobs for meager wages (Wallerstein 1990, pp. 45) and, on the other hand, those entitled to social benefits, welfare institutions, housing, or political participation (Miles 1990, pp. 172). In the context of the neoliberal order's persistent demand for cheap labor, the objective of racist discourse is not the outright termination of ties with individuals labeled as "foreign," but rather their subordination to the interests of the so-called "majority society" (Osterkamp 1991). This hierarchization of interests masks class differences and oppression mechanisms between the exploiters and the segment of the exploited that gains privileges by racist policies. It constructs an ideological unity between the two and simultaneously minimizes production costs, since workers lacking solidarity are less likely to develop a common strategy (Wallerstein 1990, p. 44; Holzkamp 1995, p. 24f).

The state, in principle, delineates a "we group" enjoying full civil rights and an "outside group" granted some of these rights only under specific conditions. Those who acquiesce to this arrangement, requiring at least compliant behavior, implicitly endorse a general deprivation of rights, deeming it legitimate for society as a whole that certain rights must be earned initially; and that all those who do not (cannot) fulfill the requirements of neo-liberal capitalism will also eventually lose these rights –regardless of their civic status (cf. Osterkamp 1987, pp. 140). The latent threat of privilege loss faced by the holders reinforces identification with the "we" group and fosters approval of measures against subordinate groups, inspiring ideologies that adopt an essentialist view of the "otherness" of constructed social groups.

This institutionalization of racism by the state stands in stark contrast to the foundational principle of the modern democratic state, which, at least in theory, guarantees the equality of all. According to Robert Miles (2000), institutionalized racism either evolves from a racist discourse but is no longer justified by it, or it represents a modified racist discourse that retains its original intention but has changed its form (p. 27). Even if no law or regulation explicitly justifies racism, they remain within the framework of racist discourse, not only reinforcing the inequality of legally defined groups, but virtually rendering it self-evident. Laws, regulations, and clauses across various legal domains ensure that the "foreign" group remains largely excluded from democratic processes, citizenship is subject to intricate and inequality-generating conditions, housing allocation and receipt of social benefits are tied to challenging conditions, professional competencies are not recognized, and regulations restricting personal rights (such as the ban on headscarves in public institutions) are implemented, among other examples (Bühl 2016, pp. 213).

Institutional racism is rooted in the structural consolidation of inequality. Irrespective of the intentions of individuals within state or societal institutions, these entities (re)produce racist discourses and discrimination through

bureaucratic processes and institutional logic. Access restrictions in the education sector, labor and housing market disparities, discrimination in the healthcare system, and instances of prejudiced and racist profiling by the judiciary and police are grounded in these structural realities (Bühl 2016, pp. 227). The media play a pivotal role in disseminating racist discourses, wielding substantial influence on public sentiment through racist language and reporting. This influence extends to other social and state institutions, perpetuating racist discourses within everyday communication.

## New configuration of racism in the neoliberal era

To comprehend the nationalist inclinations within diaspora groups, it is imperative to scrutinize racism and discriminatory social relations within the contemporary European framework, elucidating the role played by (proto-)fascist European parties. Racism, historically fashioned as both an ideology and a tool for legitimizing prevailing power structures, is intricately linked to historical conditions. The choice of which group becomes the target of racist exclusion, the underlying purpose, and the defining characteristics of a "race" or "ethnicity" are outcomes of historical determinants (Miles 2000, p. 27). Despite historical continuities, understanding racist relations necessitates an examination within specific historical and social contexts. Analyzing economic conditions, political strategies, and ideological elements that underpin the racism in question is crucial (Müller 2017, p. 106). The term racism gains its concrete meaning in its plural form, comprehensible only within its historical context (cf. Hall 2000, p. 11). Contemporary racism does not replicate what was produced by eighteenth and nineteenth-century "race" theorists; instead, it (re)constructs itself according to the needs of *today's* neoliberal capitalism, occasionally revisiting and reproducing racist schemata from past centuries.

While acknowledging the historical continuities within racist ideologies, it is essential to recognize that any specific instance of racism is an outcome shaped by the reworking of certain elements from the past and the introduction of novel components (Miles 2000, p. 27). The composition of this configuration, the amalgamation of both historical and contemporary elements into a unified entity, is contingent upon prevailing concerns within specific historical social relations. Étienne Balibar (1992) posits that a new configuration of racism relies on pre-existing schemas of collective memory intertwined with a society's institutional and cultural history. Balibar identifies colonialism and anti-Semitism as the primary schemas of racism in the European context, serving as the foundation for newer forms like anti-Muslim racism. Activation of these schemas hinges upon a social structure of discrimination economically functional and embedded in the state's organization. In twentieth-century Europe, this structure was given by the hierarchy of qualifications between "native" and "foreign" workers who were brought from the periphery to the centers. The essential moment for this new configuration of racism, according to Balibar, arises during an institutional constellation of crisis, disrupting the relationship *of* the state to its ideological

foundations and individuals' identity-forming relationship *to* the state (Balibar 1992, pp. 18).

In contemporary Western Europe's post-Fordist, neoliberal transformation, a crisis-induced institutional constellation plays a pivotal role. Globalization and advanced production technology lead to downsizing in the industrial sector, diminishing the demand for traditional labor and intensifying competition within the working class in the capitalist metropolises of Europe. The political-ideological transformation of society according to the interests of capital cannot take place without the involvement of the classes remote from capital. Neither can the change in the technical basis of exploitation strategies, which, in turn, prepares the ground for neoliberal policies by securing the technical and organizational basis of global capitalism (Kaindl 2013, p. 22). Mobilization via (proto-)fascist parties becomes therefore a mechanism for involving classes remote from capital in social transformation. These parties, flexible and creative enough to reconcile diverse interests and reconfigure old racist schemes on the basis of the already existing, economically functional structure of discrimination, find success in mobilizing dissatisfaction with societal restructuring (Marvakis 2013).

The post-war era has given rise to significant societal constructs, namely the welfare state (with its social benefits including publicly funded social work) and solidarity-based workers' organizations, which serve as pillars of social unity. Paradoxically, these entities find themselves in direct opposition to neoliberal ideology, which advocates for minimal state intervention in social wealth distribution. Instead, the neoliberal agenda emphasizes state involvement in societal reform for market-driven purposes through stringent control and authoritative security measures (Schreiner 2015, p. 20). To legitimize this authoritarian security policy, neoliberal parties often resort to nationalist and racist rhetoric. The racist discourse plays a crucial role in justifying the calls to dismantle the welfare state in the name of liberation from "state paternalism" and to weaken solidarity organizations and democratic institutions. This strategy, framed as a battle against bureaucracy and elites, proves successful in mobilizing classes distanced from capital (cf. Schui et al. 1997, pp. 152.; Reimer 2013, pp. 33.). The crisis repercussions and dissatisfaction with societal restructuring fuel demands from below for the "restoration of order" in various aspects of social life. Neoliberal parties exploit alleged increases in crime rates, corruption, or misuse of social benefits, framing them as signs of moral decay or a crisis of authority. This narrative reflects "popular sentiment," providing a pretext for advocating for the extraordinary use of state force and control. Discussions about the 'wasteful' welfare state and the portrayal of welfare recipients as exploiting social benefits and living at the expense of society often incorporate elements of racist schemata (cf. Hall 2014, pp. 117).

Racist discourses in the neoliberal order serve the ideological function of shifting seemingly intractable social problems – including not only the consequences of economic dislocation (unemployment, homelessness, etc.), but also the antagonisms resulting from society's preparation for the free market (contradictory definitions of gender roles, moral contradictions, the crisis of

social institutions, etc.) – to a level where they can be framed as a manageable opposition between "us" and "them." This translation presents a way to address these problems, seemingly offering a coping mechanism while alleviating the pressure created by social contradictions (Elfferding 2000, p. 43). This racist constitution of meaning provides an explanation for the directly experienced world, prescribing or implying a specific political strategy (Miles 2000, p. 26). The shift or displacement of social contradictions to another level is not an individual endeavor, but is orchestrated by social institutions such as the media, political parties, churches, and others (Elfferding, 2000, p. 43). This discourse, grounded in a vaguely defined, nation-state-bound "Leitkultur" (*dominant culture*), is reproduced by various actors (Völkel 2017, p. 92).

Thus, in social work practice, recognizing that racist tendencies are rooted in real fears is crucial. These fears emanate from a genuine concern about being bypassed by social change and losing agency. However, the solutions sought in racist tendencies are unrealistic, aiming for resolutions where the least resistance is to be expected, such as depriving migrants of their basic rights (Osterkamp 1991, p. 53). Racist discourses grapple with the experience of helplessness in the face of inscrutable social conditions, conveying the illusion of action at the expense of others. This illusory sense of agency is contingent on existing social conditions and implies an agreement with them.

The construction of one's own group against a "foreign" one, aligning with the existing legal and social order, creates a "dominance culture." This culture influences the attitudes, feelings, and interpretations of all members of society, viewing "foreigners" as deviations from societal norms due to their "cultural" peculiarities (Rommelspacher 1998, p.22). Racist parties and movements position themselves as guardians of the existing order and values. In essence, one's "own national identity," defined abstractly in terms of conformity with certain values and legal instances, translates to identification with existing power relations and a willingness to submit to them. The racist discourse ensures not only the subordination of the interests of the "others" to those of the "own" group, but also the obedience of members of the so-called "majority society" to the state and legal system (Kalpaka & Räthzel 2000, p. 182). On the political level, this discourse echoes in the neoliberal critique of the "incompetent" welfare state and the authoritarian demand for the restoration of order – preferably through a rebellion of lower classes against the existing order, which is, in reality, a demonstration of special loyalty to existing power relations and an attempt to gain agency through submission (Kalpaka & Räthzel 2017, pp. 182; Osterkamp 1996, p. 136).

We must perceive contemporary racism as a systemic construct. Within this system, two groups are delineated and juxtaposed based on the interests of capital and state interventions. One group is mandated to subordinate its interests to the other, while the privileged group enjoys specific rights and opportunities. To maintain these privileges, the privileged group is expected, in turn, to actively endorse this dichotomy by aligning with prevailing power structures. Racist and nationalist ideologies serve as tools to legitimize this conformity. Discriminated groups must forge their own coping mechanisms, strategies for action, and

avenues for resistance, which fundamentally differ from those of the privileged group.

## Navigating the impact of racism on individuals

The persistent propagation of a racist discourse often coincides with a systematic denial of structural racism, narrowing the focus to extreme and violent manifestations typically associated with marginalized groups. This dual strategy serves to morally justify behavior aligned with social norms and, concurrently, undermines the foundation for collective resistance among those affected, relegating them to a minoritarian status in their protests (Van Dijk 1992, p. 105; Osterkamp 1996, pp. 158).

Recent events, such as "Black Lives Matter" demonstrations, the assertive stance of young people against racism on social media, and the establishment of organizations, have contributed to a heightened awareness of structural racism, especially among younger generations. However, in Austria, this awareness appears confined primarily to the educated middle class. Among those affected, coping with their situation—being subjected to structural discrimination and facing limited legitimate avenues to combat it due to systematic denial—manifests in various ways. For instance, there is a prevalent sense of general mistrust towards the so-called "majority society" and its institutions. This skepticism extends to the social work in its control function. Individuals encountering racism often perceive the "majority society" as complicit, as racist practices can persist only with the tacit approval of the majority, making the majority's complicity more critical than overt acts of racism or individual racist statements. Moreover, discriminated individuals frequently find it unclear where social workers stand, questioning whether engaging with this professional group might expose them to further racist experiences. This distrust deepens—rightly so—when social workers inadvertently perpetuate racist or culturalist stereotypes and downplay experiences of racism. Given that this skepticism also extends to other institutions such as the police, the judiciary, schools, and the health system, individuals commonly opt to minimize interactions with social institutions and resolve issues within their own communities whenever possible, to avoid new racist encounters. This withdrawal into "safe spaces" is also observable in private spheres. Such a response to racist conditions is often criticized as the creation of "parallel societies" (*Parallelgesellschaft*), further limiting opportunities for those facing racism to disengage.

Some individuals, faced with relentless racist demands, capitulate in an attempt to achieve "full integration" or assimilation, often in vain. This surrender can result in the normalization of discrimination, either socially ("we are only guests here," "it is like this everywhere") or on an individual level ("because I wear different clothes," "because I do not speak German well enough yet," etc.). A prevalent form of normalization involves aligning with racist demands and adopting a hostile stance towards other targets of racism. The pressure for complete submission may lead to the hardening of positions, manifesting as

"counter-racism" or the cultivation of a nationalist or religious ideology, attempting to reverse the established hierarchy of power, albeit often idealistically.


## Let brothers not fight!

The prevalent nationalist tendencies among migrants, culminating in the 2020 riots in Vienna, should be assessed in the context of the explanations offered thus far and in connection with the actual experiences of young people. Exploring the complex realm of ideologies within diaspora groups, particularly their potential for violence, serves as a focal point for practical pedagogical efforts with young people. While various coping strategies are employed, the retreat into nationalist and racist ideologies poses special challenges, rendering young individuals susceptible to manipulation. A poignant illustration of this phenomenon emerges from the 2020 riots in Vienna, which offer valuable insights into the functions of such ideologies within diaspora groups.

During the upheavals, as youth workers at the JUVIVO.21 youth center in Vienna's 21st district, we were actively engaged with the events. Monitoring social media posts of the center's visitors, contacting young demonstrators, and later incorporating the discussions into the center's activities became integral aspects of our involvement. Subsequently, in 2021, we collaborated with young people from the center on a video project[1], drawing from a co-worker's B.A. thesis, which explored the experiences of three young individuals connected to the riots (Gutschelhofer 2021). In this thesis, interviews were conducted with three young individuals, who were either actively involved in the riots or expressed a desire to participate, but were prevented by various reasons. Two of them identified as Turkish nationalists, while one considered himself aligned with Kurdish activists. One of these Turkish nationalist youths also participated in the video project. Furthermore, the project involved two other young men who, at the time, identified themselves as being affiliated with the Grey Wolves.

Based on the interviews and the young people's experiences, a script was collectively developed. Throughout the process, the participants engaged in profound reflections on their motivations. A four-minute film was subsequently produced in collaboration with a skilled filmmaker, in which the young individuals actively participated, assuming leading roles. The video was shared on various platforms including TikTok, Instagram, and YouTube, and it was presented publicly. Besides participating in the public presentation, the young contributors also granted interviews to major newspapers. To make the film appealing to a wider audience of young people, elements of youth culture, including youth-friendly language and emotional scenes, were highlighted.

The video project is divided into four segments, with the initial part serving as a trailer. In the second segment, Atilla, a Turkish teenager, spends time in a

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[1] The video project is a cooperation of the youth center JUVIVO.21 and bOJA (Bundesweites Netzwerk Offene Jugendarbeit); it can be accessed with English subtitles on the YouTube channel "Bro&Kontra" at https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tkmt-dwXpWY&ab_channel=Bro%26Kontra

park with his two friends. The news, circulating through social media, reveals that a Kurd has allegedly removed the headscarf of a Turkish woman during a demonstration, prompting a call for a gathering in Vienna's 10th district to protest. The young men decide to join. Witnessing the massive demonstration, Atilla feels an empowering sensation, akin to being the "boss of every Turk." However, conflicting thoughts arise as he remembers his mother's words: "Let brothers not fight against each other!"

In the third part, Atilla acknowledges the empowering feeling, but admits he fears potential violence. Despite the urge to leave, his pride prevails, and he decides to stay, worried that avoiding participation might result in exclusion. As they reach the top of a hill, tensions escalate, but older Turkish men intervene, advising them to return home, emphasizing that "enough is enough." Out of respect for the elders, the young men comply and exit the demonstration. Up to this point, the script draws from the actual experiences of the young men. The last part of the movie is a creative addition by the young men for dramatic effect.

In this concluding segment, the trio encounters a Kurdish boy on the street wearing a balaclava like the others, and assume he is the one responsible for the headscarf incident. Although Atilla is no longer inclined to engage in violence, his friends continue to egg him on, and eventually they succeed. After Attilla confronts and assaults the Kurdish youth, the young man removes his balaclava, revealing himself as a close friend of Atilla's; the two grew up together "like brothers." Atilla questions the sense in their conflict, pondering, "why are we actually fighting?" In an additional part, Atilla emphasizes that within his circle of friends, there is no distinction between Turks and Kurds – they consider themselves brothers and vow to resist getting turned against each other "no matter by which side."

The entire video project took approximately six months to finalize. Throughout the process, all three young participants distinctly distanced themselves from the Grey Wolves. Subsequently, in 2022, they collaborated with other young girls and boys from the youth center on another film that addresses violence against women.

Now, let's delve into some of the outcomes and results yielded by this project.

## The notion of imaginary power: Understanding long-distance nationalism among diaspora youth

It's important to recognize that nationalist sentiments are not exclusive to Turkish youth in the diaspora. A perusal of Instagram accounts belonging to various young individuals with migration backgrounds reveals a plethora of self-descriptions such as "proud Turk," "proud Arab," "proud Muslim," "proud Albanian," "proud Kurdish," and more in their bios. While conducting a detailed sociological analysis of the reasons behind the success of right-wing ideologies among young people is beyond the scope of this article, a brief exploration of

Turkish nationalist tendencies among the youth can contribute to understanding the social context of Turkish nationalism in the diaspora.

Children of migrant families face a higher likelihood of being impacted by unemployment and poverty compared to their peers who do not experience racist discrimination (e.g., Algan et al., 2010). They directly contend with institutionalized and structural racism, along with segregation within school systems (Moris-Lange, Wendt, & Wohlfarth, 2013). Originating from traditional working-class backgrounds, they often struggle to acquire the necessary social skills demanded by the neoliberal economic order, facing disadvantages both at home and in schools characterized by segregation. Classical gender stereotypes exert a significant influence, contributing to their marginalization in the neoliberal labor market. These young individuals also keenly perceive everyday racism in political discussions and mass media.

Their apparent disinterest in the politics of the country in which they live often reflects a lack of opportunities for participation and their exclusion from politics. It is precisely in this context that young people encounter a dearth of opportunities for meaningful action, feeling powerless and overshadowed by the privileged. The nationalist ideologies of their families' countries of origin provide them with imagined avenues for action and spheres of influence. Benedict Anderson aptly characterizes these opportunities for action that *long-distance nationalism* unfolds:

> The more a diaspora group feels excluded, disregarded, ignored and discriminated against, the more it tends to turn to the politics of its home country – especially when the country is in trouble. Then people start sending Internet messages, making propaganda, sending money, maybe even buying weapons. In rich Western countries, people can do many things that allow them to have a real influence on events at home. There are many diaspora communities whose homeland is in great trouble, torn apart domestically. But the condition for influence is that these people can imagine themselves as heroes, sometimes even heroines. They are fighting on the Internet, not on the battlefield, for their country, for liberation. And that's an entirely different experience (Anderson, 2012, pp. 41).

In this context, it is crucial to differentiate between nationalism and racism against "migrants" and the phenomenon of "long-distance nationalism" prevalent in diaspora communities. As previously underscored, in contemporary Western and Northern Europe's current manifestations of racism, the primary challenge lies in the abstract and conformist nature of one's "own" national identity, characterized by adherence to existing values and power structures. These power dynamics result from state interventions and are not mere constructs; they represent legal realities.

In contrast, long-distance nationalism does not necessitate conformity to the prevailing conditions of the nation-state where the diaspora resides. Instead, it offers an "imaginary" empowerment in an ancestral "imagined homeland" of parents or grandparents, even though individuals in the diaspora frequently experience discrimination in that "home country" as well. Nationalist ideology

asserts a willingness to embrace them as heroes or heroines, as they diverge from neoliberal society's expectations to acquire new social skills and develop "acceptable" coping mechanisms for their experiences of discrimination -given the reduced demand for cheap labor- in order to find a legitimate place in society.

Nationalism, in turn, idealizes their traditional way of life, gender norms, and responses to ethnic and social discrimination. Consequently, nationalism proposes that the marginalized group attains a position of power not only over other ethnic groups in their so-called "homeland," but also over the discriminatory segment of the society in the country of residence. Nationalist ideologies often associate the oppressed groups in the "homeland" with oppressors in Europe, creating the illusion of resistance against colonialism, imperialism, or even racism. For instance, it is common to encounter narratives in pro-government Turkish newspapers suggesting that European politicians instigate the Kurdish issue and insinuating that Kurdish organizations may enjoy the support and protection of European or North American governments.

The concept of being "actually" morally superior and the imagined prospect of returning to a "golden age" when one's "own" group held sway over others take precedence over the possibilities of action in the struggle against oppression in the country in which the diaspora group lives – a prospect that may seem impractical or perilous. Therefore, discussions on nationalist ideologies among so-called "migrants" cannot be isolated from the oppression they encounter and the existing power relations. Racism in the privileged sectors of society and the long-distance nationalism of diaspora groups represent two interrelated facets of the same issue.

Similarly, nationalism within the diaspora group is not necessarily synonymous with the nationalism advocated by nationalist parties and groups in the "homeland" for comparable reasons. Long-distance nationalism does not confer real power upon young people in the diaspora over marginalized groups in the "homeland," especially when they lack familiarity with the intricacies of that environment. In many instances, they may lack the social or linguistic leverage necessary to thrive in the "homeland." Genuine power might only be attainable in exceptional cases for individuals who have established robust connections with the "deep state" and are willing to engage in illicit activities on its behalf. In other cases, this power remains illusory and serves solely as a form of strong identification with oppressive groups. This imaginary power proves highly advantageous for the governments of the "homelands," and they consistently uphold it. While the European media may make minimal efforts to connect with migrants, pro-government media in the "home countries" strive to engage diaspora groups through special broadcasts and content. Governments view this as an opportunity to exert political influence and mobilize the diaspora, primarily as a significant source of funding.

## Shaping Identity: The Interplay of Nationalism and Identity Formation in the Diaspora

Another crucial aspect is the role of nationalist ideologies in shaping identity. In this context, it is essential to consider not only the social aspects, but also the developmental psychological aspects. Within such a framework, the interplay of experienced ethnic discrimination and nationalist ideology is significant, exerting a profound influence on the identity formation of young people in the diaspora.
The following statement of a young person explains his desire not to be considered a member of a discriminated group:

> Well, it... with us, so we have, many Turks have complexes with such things. When you say. 'Yes, you're just a shitty Turk' for example, the one who ... I'm one of those who gets upset when you say that, not from the point of view that I'm really a shitty Turk, but I don't see myself as a Turk, but I see myself more as an Ottoman (Gutschelhofer, 2011, p. 23).

The inclination to identify as Ottoman may stem from a desire to escape the subordinate role associated with being a discriminated "guest worker" and instead assume a dominant position.
These notions of identity serve a practical purpose in daily life. Faced with constant discrimination, young individuals seek refuge by carving out niches in society where they are free from racist prejudice. Nationalist ideology plays a crucial role in binding these communities together. When a group shares the same nationalist beliefs, it ensures a sense of solidarity and understanding among its members, eliminating the need for constant explanations or justifications. In an interview as part of the video project, individuals who have distanced themselves from the Grey Wolves elaborate on the role of nationalist ideology in the formation of such groups:

> "At the age of 13, everyone was a Bozkurt" [Grey Wolf, S.B.], Cengiz says. "But then you have no idea what that means either," he says. For him, it simply meant being Turkish. "If I met someone, and he was also a Bozkurt, then it was easy: It's ok. One word and you were friends," Cengiz says. The two other boys nod as he says this. In the meantime, they know how wrong that is. "We all had abis [elder brothers, S.B.] who enlightened us at some point," Atilla says. "Only children support the Bozkurt. And too much national pride is not good either." (Kücüktekin 2021).

In the context of everyday conversations in youth work, it is frequently observed that young individuals identifying with the Grey Wolves and displaying far-right symbols possess limited knowledge about the Grey Wolves or the MHP. For them, the term "Grey Wolf" is used interchangeably with "proud Turk." In these instances, the name and symbolism serve a distinct function in shaping identity and fostering a sense of group belonging within the diaspora.

## Youth Cultural Dynamics: A Closer Look at Right-Wing Ideology's Allure

Youth cultural elements constitute a significant aspect, with the action-oriented nature of right-wing ideology proving particularly appealing to the younger demographic. This allure is evident in various cultural expressions such as popular TV series, Hip-Hop music, and numerous contemporary video games. These cultural media often glamorize a perilous lifestyle characterized by intense action, confrontations, and skirmishes, fostering an environment that resonates with the adventurous spirit of young individuals.

A young person in Favoriten explains in the following way why he participated:

> "I was bored," Cengiz recalls of June 25, when he got a message on his cell phone. "A Kurd pulled down a sister's headscarf. Come all Reumann" [Reumann Square in Favoriten, S.B.]. "I thought: it's ok. Action. I'm in!" says Cengiz. For the 17-year-old, it sounded like fun (Kücüktekin 2021).

A considerable number of participants remain unaware of the genuine motivations behind the riots in Favoriten. Young individuals, influenced by various rumors circulating through social networks, spontaneously chose to join the events. Beyond the element of enjoyment, the sense of belonging to a group holds significant sway in their participation. Reasons frequently cited by the youth include the reluctance to let down their friends (Gutschelhofer 2021, p. 24) and the desire to maintain a positive image within their peer group (Kücüktekin, 2021). The involvement of individuals from diverse ethnic backgrounds, such as Turks, Afghans, Chechens, Bulgarians, Pakistanis, etc., in the Favoriten riots can be attributed to youth cultural factors like loyalty to the peer group, a thirst for action, and an attraction to a perilous lifestyle. This confluence underscores that the attackers represented a mixture of young people from various ethnic origins, united by shared cultural inclinations.

## Preventive Measures Against Nationalist Ideologies

The three dimensions of nationalist ideologies—imaginary power against oppression, identity-forming function, and youth cultural aspects—hold significant relevance in the context of preventive youth work. As previously outlined, young individuals can align themselves with the Grey Wolves and adopt their symbols without engaging in a formalized structure or possessing in-depth knowledge about the ideological background of the Grey Wolves. Both right-wing groups and entities associated with the Turkish "deep state" often target such youth for recruitment, as these individuals, perceived as heroic figures, bring with them a predisposition to manipulation and a willingness to employ violence. However, it is crucial to note that not every young person identifying with the Grey Wolves or their symbols is necessarily an organized and ideologically driven fascist.

In the context of preventive youth work, it is imperative to engage in reflective discussions with young people regarding the illusory avenues for action presented by nationalist ideologies. The ideal approach involves replacing these imaginary prospects with tangible opportunities to combat discrimination and oppression within the local context. A fundamental stance in this work is to genuinely acknowledge the experiences of discrimination faced by young individuals and to establish inclusive spaces for open discussions on these experiences, fostering the exploration of potential collective strategies for action. Preventive efforts should extend beyond addressing everyday racism to encompass a critical examination of structural and institutionalized racism as inherent social realities. It is essential to challenge not only the behaviors of those experiencing discrimination, but also to scrutinize the role of the nation-state and its legal interventions. Taking a stand for the oppressed serves a dual purpose—it strengthens one's capacity for action and serves as a positive role model for others within the community.

Nevertheless, in the realm of preventive work, meticulous attention must be dedicated to preventing the reproduction of prevailing power imbalances, especially between adult "European" youth workers and young individuals from migrant backgrounds. The approach should be characterized by equality, occurring at eye level and rooted in the specific interests and needs of the young people involved. Youth work in this context assumes a role of solidarity and support, diverging from a traditional "educational" stance that may inadvertently perpetuate power dynamics. Instead, the emphasis lies on fostering a collaborative environment where an exchange of experiences can occur both among the young participants themselves and with those engaged in youth work. This approach aims to facilitate mutual understanding and create a space for shared learning and growth.

Engaging in collective discussions on the intricacies of identity formation and actively reframing nationalist narratives are other crucial components of preventive work. The challenge does not lie in the fact that a group of young individuals identifies themselves as Turks, as this identification is predominantly externally defined. The true concern emerges from the construction of their Turkish identity through the marginalization of other groups.

The process of reframing presents an opportunity to preserve group identity without succumbing to nationalist narratives. For instance, one can take pride in being a Turk without aligning with the Young Turks responsible for the Armenian Genocide of 1915. There exists the possibility of embracing Turkish heritage by identifying with individuals who opposed the Young Turk policies and demonstrated solidarity with Armenian civilians. This approach encourages a nuanced and inclusive perspective on identity, fostering a sense of pride rooted in shared values rather than divisive historical events.

Preventive work extends to addressing the cultural aspects of youth. This involves recognizing the significance of the enjoyment factor, approaching the topic with humor, and providing alternative enjoyable activities for young individuals. Continuous dialogue with young people, staying informed about youth culture, and actively engaging with the latest trends in music, media, and

social networking are vital components of prevention work. Open conversations about friendship styles, relationships, and life concepts contribute to creating a supportive environment. In this context, it remains crucial to critically examine and challenge nationalist and patriarchal narratives, assisting young people in developing their own life concepts and friendship styles that align with their current interests. The fundamental pillar of preventive work lies in adopting an interested, stance-taking, open, needs-oriented, relationship-building, and solidarity-based approach. However, it would be counterproductive for prevention efforts to hastily draw conclusions without first comprehending the genuine reasons behind young people's actions.

## Critical Reflections on Social Work in the Context of Racist and Nationalist Ideologies

In conclusion, I would like to share some reflections on anti-racist social work. These considerations hold significance not only due to their practical implications, but are also imperative for the very survival of the social work profession. The connection between social work and racism extends beyond providing support to those impacted by racism or working with individuals susceptible to racist ideologies.

The neoliberal narrative, infused with racist and nationalist ideologies, establishes a paradigm where a group's right to existence is contingent upon its performance. This perspective grants social work legitimacy only in its role as serving the activating state. In this framework, the state views social benefits purely as a transactional arrangement, compelling social work to focus on disciplining individuals to proactively seek employment. Consequently, the sense of solidarity within society diminishes, transforming social work into a tool for enforcing discipline and control dictated by the capitalist market. The emphasis on individual subjectivity and advocacy progressively takes a backseat, yielding ground to administrative logic and the burgeoning demands of the market (Seithe 2010, p. 200; Thoma 2016, p. 61).

As political subjects, both in their theoretical frameworks and through their practical applications, social workers not only (re)produce social relations, but are also active participants within these very relationships and inevitably shaped by them. Consequently, their concern should extend beyond expanding clients' possibilities for action to encompass their own constrained possibilities within the neoliberal system. The foundational choice of social work practitioners to engage in social work institutions is intricately linked to whether they acknowledge their own limitations and are content to function as agents of activation, discipline, and control for the market, thereby (whether consciously or unconsciously) perpetuating discriminatory conditions. Overcoming this restrictive mindset aligned with existing social relations requires recognizing one's position as a political subject. This recognition transcends social workers merely advocating for their clients due to a presumed high level of professional ethics or inherent "goodness." Instead, it involves acknowledging that the

neoliberal system is actively undermining social solidarity. This system is steering social workers, in their professional practice, towards a controlling function at the expense of their aiding role, while also subjecting them to precarious conditions as wage workers. However, social workers can emancipate themselves from this system by realizing that their interests fundamentally align with those of their clients. Both social workers and their clients must collectively develop possibilities for action within and against the neoliberal system. Social work cannot evade scrutinizing the internal connections between prevailing racist ideologies, which seek to fragment and desolidarize society, and the transformation of its own professional image according to market demands. It is crucial to bear in mind that, while the neoliberal system restricts possibilities of action, it also undeniably opens up new fields and opportunities for action. This transformation affects not only the structures and forms of social work, but also its content, problems, target groups, and themes (cf. Marvakis 2016).

A crucial aspect of this analysis involves dedicated reflection on the theories that underpin social work practice, even if practitioners are not always consciously aware of them (Holzkamp 2012). Central to such reflection would be the transformation of the conception of humanity and society within the realm of social work. This is particularly significant because the neoliberal, activating welfare state, with its portrayal of individuals emphasizing self-responsibility, necessitates the individualization of social issues and advocates for a form of social work that is both individualized and depoliticized.

To comprehend and address racism effectively, social work must initially scrutinize the functionality and significance of racist schemas, taking into account the structures within which individuals operate (Kalpaka & Räthzel 2017, pp. 23.). Emphasizing social relations and the social mediation of individual issues, as noted by Osterkamp (1991, p. 58), does not imply absolving individuals (including social workers) of the responsibility for their racist behaviors. Instead, it suggests that these behaviors can be dialectically transcended as potential courses of action within the framework of evolving social conditions and the circumstances of perceived helplessness.

This intricate interplay between social structures and individual actions demands a particular focus from social work. It necessitates a thorough examination and reflection on social work's own participation in existing social relations, as well as its alignments with the prevailing mode of production and configurations of power. A precise analysis of social work's dual role - as both help and control - aids in differentiating instances of resistance from those affected by racism, even when such resistance might not be immediately apparent – consider, for instance, the public wearing of religious symbols like a headscarf. In such a scenario, imposing one's own models of emancipation onto others as a universal standard and, for example, problematizing submission to religious or patriarchal authorities, entails a certain alignment with the existing power structure. The power structure does not demand that subjects emancipate themselves or submit to non-patriarchal authorities; rather, it dictates submission to the instances within the existing constellation. Consequently, the issue at hand is not submission in itself, but submission to the 'wrong' authorities. Hence, it is

crucial for social work to dissect power constellations in relation to its own actions to genuinely grasp the emancipatory moments within the target group (cf. Kalpaka & Räthzel 2000, p. 188). A headscarf, for instance, can symbolize submission to patriarchy and *simultaneously* serve as a form of protest, a resistance against racist discrimination, highlighting one's divergence from the colonialist through personal appearance.

Effectively addressing racism within the realm of social work requires a comprehensive approach that incorporates racist discrimination as a foundational social structure in the analysis of individual and societal issues, as well as within the framework of its own activities. This entails honing a discerning perspective that identifies instances of both arrangement and resistance among those involved, including social workers. Just as the young people's embrace of long-distance nationalism can be viewed as an alignment with power relations in their envisioned "homeland" and simultaneously as a resistance to power relations in their current locale, the rejection of any nationalist ideology per se by youth workers may also serve as an alignment with existing power structures. Confronting this complexity necessitates a commitment to learning from young people, adopting a stance of solidarity that avoids premature conclusions, and instead collaboratively exploring the motivations behind the actions of young people. This approach involves a critical analysis of both their motives and one's own reasons for action.

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