

# The Exit from Discrimination

Kollektiv Mailand / Innenhof

## A. What is it?

Derogatory behavior towards people based on their origin, belonging to certain ethnicities / peoples / cultures, skin color, gender, belief, physical or mental characteristics, social rank, sexual identities, and more ... all these phenomena have different historical origins and their own complex structures. They must be considered in a differentiated manner. And yet it all shares a common element: **“chauvinism”**. Chauvinism describes a thought pattern in which people are placed in superficial categories through prejudices and stereotypes and assigned to specific groupings. In doing so, one’s own grouping - for example, “we Germans”, “we men” or “we heterosexuals” - will be considered superior and placed above others. Usually this means that other groups are depreciated accordingly and perceived as inferior. In some cases (as in the case of anti-Semitism, for example), the devaluation of the out-group also occurs because it is thought to be too powerful and therefore threatening.

## B. The practice of chauvinism is discrimination

The behavior that results from this chauvinist orientation is discrimination. People of

other groups are devalued, solely on the basis of the alleged belonging to a group that is regarded as inferior or threatening. This works as follows: individual attributes have been assigned to specific groups in the past. These allegations are now seen as inherent to all members of the relevant group, and consequently they are attached to them in every area of life. From the point of view of some especially prevalent chauvinist ideas, members of the grouping “women” are traditionally regarded as overly emotional and in need of help, members of the grouping “Germans” as particularly orderly and disciplined, members of the grouping “black” as unhygienic and lazy, and members of the group “Muslims” as criminal and terrorist, to name just a few examples (of course, people can usually be assigned to several of these categories at the same time). The mere group membership is enough to be treated accordingly, there is only an inadequate reality check for chauvinist-oriented people, if there is one at all.

On the basis of such generalizations, people from groups that are subjected to negative attributes, are more disadvantaged than people from other, more favored groups. In Germany, for example, people who do not correspond to the classic image of a “German” find it much more difficult to

find an apartment or work. Employers fear that people can not be very industrious and ambitious because such attributes are reserved for the grouping “Germans”. Another prominent example is the fact that, according to the statistics of the Federal Statistical Office, 2016, women receive on average 21% less salary than men. Here, women are referred to the role of the “passive, unassertive woman”, who is “already satisfied”. Thereby, a rise to higher positions is usually denied to them. And as long as people are forced into such roles that incapacitate them, the preconceptions and stereotypes will also be preserved. This is precisely why it is of immense importance to pay attention to these problems and to intervene in these falsely assumed stereotypes. This cycle must end, the spell must be broken.

In Germany, discrimination is not only unconstitutional in Germany in the sense of the Grundgesetz and the prohibition of discrimination deriving from its Article 3, but also in contradiction to humanistic fundamental convictions, such as the fact that all people are equal. These human rights, which are recognized and protected by almost all states, are being broken and a twisted narrative is introduced instead, which makes it possible for human life to

have different “value”. These anti-human attitudes are based mostly on fantastic and unrealistic beliefs, which, however, are erroneously raised to existential, supra-temporal truths by those who are caught by their spell. The difficulty is that some of these myths, including the chauvinist ways of thinking, are as old as humanity itself. They have been passed on from generation to generation and preserved through unreflected tradition preservation. These hardened and musty views can only be defended by those who hold them with a weak: “it’s always been like that”. There are no rational, sound arguments to be made.

### **C. Socialization**

Chauvinist attitudes - such as sexism / anti-feminism, anti-Semitism, homo- / transphobia, antiziganism (rejection of Sinti and Roma) and others - (still) are part of the traditional self-understanding of most societies and have to be overcome. However, as long as this has not happened, these myths are rooted in the minds of the societies, sometimes subconsciously (subconscious dislikes of certain groups are called “resentment”). All people who are born into this structure are automatically imbued with chauvinism, thereby integrating it into their own orientations and behavior - without necessarily being aware that this is happening and what consequences it has. A society that is permeated with chauvinistic resentment can only offer a chauvinistic

socialization. No person in this society can thus claim to be completely detached from this influence.

The extent of the problem becomes clear when one considers what the danger is in believing in notions that lead to the idea that there are human lives that are “more” and “less valuable”. This already is a statement that fits neatly on racial theories such as Hitler’s national socialism. Further above, it is already mentioned that the practice of chauvinist thinking is discrimination. Now, however, it is clear that in an environment of corresponding, chauvinistic potential, one is not far removed from actual persecution, open violence, racist agitation, or worse. A society characterized by chauvinism (that is, a society that, so to speak, traditionally discriminates against people), such as the German one, resembles a powder keg. However, it is not just these old-fashioned, dusty habits that constitute the problem of “discrimination”. Through the continuing pressure of modern civil society, questions such as “Who is better?”, “Who comes out on top?” or “What is the value of what I am doing?” are of central importance. This becomes clear in childhood, beginning with school and its totalitarian grading system, in the adult age and professional life, in which people are mercilessly judged according to numbers and results, as well as in private life, in which attributes, etiquette and status symbols for personal prestige must be accumulated, in order to look good in social comparisons. The social position is defined

by professional success. Whoever can not keep up here, slips into the social fringe and is socially dependent. There is a permanent comparative pressure, a bitter competition, which is determined by the fear of social decline. Here, too, one can clearly see a basic value-oriented relationship between people and the dogma of competition, hand in hand with a chauvinist orientation. This structural condition not only maintains the problem of “chauvinism”, but also elevates it to the basic normal condition, which we learn from as early as childhood. Discrimination proves itself to be a fundamental mechanism of the performance society, evoked by the competing self-understanding of the capitalist economic order. Therefore, an overcoming of chauvinism remains unthinkable, as long as society is characterized by this ruling economic order. At this point, it becomes necessary to look more closely at the dynamics of capitalism.

### **D. Capitalism**

“Capitalism” is the world’s dominant economic and social order. What does capitalism mean? It means that there must always be growth, that is, profit must be generated more and more quickly and cost-effectively. The whole social life in capitalism is then determined by this orientation. Every activity, thought, matter, time, person, ... everything is measured by how much money can be made from it, everything is translated into “value” and made into a commodity.

According to the comprehensive social analysis of Karl Marx, the labor power of a person is also a commodity, which he or she is forced to sell on the labor market in order to survive. Labor is exchanged for wages in order to produce more goods with it. With the workforce of a person, more value can be produced than the working person himself gets paid for this production - in this way the company generates a »surplus value«. This is invested again in order to produce even more, to generate more value and so the cycle continues: that is the only purpose of it all. The wage is merely meant to reproduce the commodity "labor power" in this endless loop. Capitalism follows a logic without thinking or ethical authority. It is a technical process. As a result, there is always the tendency to further reduce wages in order to make this cycle even more profitable.

So everything is about costs and values: how much does the labor force of the employees cost? How much does the production of a product cost? How much does the final product cost? This relationship leads to competition between all parties. Both between companies, as well as between the workers. Since all people are forced to sell their labor power in competitive situations on the labor market, work becomes the central factor of survival that determines everyday life and we now see other people as competition: who sells their labor more favorably? Who has what price and what can he / she offer to a company?

Who offers the best value for money? In the same way as market competition prevails between companies, labor market competition between people prevails. Both are markets dealing with commodities and both follow the technical, capitalist process outlined above, which, as I showed, can not be humanitarian. As a result, we are only faced with value evaluations. Humans have become a commodity to themselves. There is no alternative outcome in a commodity society.

### **And now?**

The problem of "discrimination" can not be viewed separately from the social preconditions, nor can it be separated from its given systemic influences. Capitalist society has an inner logic by which it encourages the struggle against others in a competitive labor market: one's own promotion works particularly well with the simultaneous devaluation of others. Capitalism thus acts as a catalyst for the chauvinist orientation. This capitalist structure produces an ideology of opposites and thereby fires up discriminatory practices to an extreme extent. Due to the permanent competition between human beings and the fundamental pressure in performance-oriented, capitalist society, the psychological strategy is to discriminate against weaker groups or minorities. That is, in capitalism, as soon as we think of people as belonging to categories, it must be categories that are in competition with

each other. If we stick to these superficial categories, the already existing chauvinism threatens to turn into extremist forms of right-wing authoritarianism. If we were not to think of superficial categories and instead treat people more differentiated, it could be seen that the attributions of standardized behaviors - which are supposed to be infallibly correct only because of the belonging to a grouping - can not hold at all. And adhering strictly to this differentiated approach, the groupings would become smaller and smaller, the allocation increasingly complex and refined. Only in this way would it be possible to do justice to humans and see them as they really are. And, in the end, we would realize that there should be as many groups as human beings, to stay with the whole truth. Everyone would need to be seen with new eyes and in an unbiased manner. Only that is reality, everything else just happens in our heads. In this way, we would come to realize that the idea of grouping people into groups is completely superfluous and can be abolished. However, given the structural circumstances, this cannot be real practice and thus remains a beautiful-painterly and naive utopia. For as long as the people are exposed to this all-capitalistic pressure, this highly invasive and manipulative influence will always be more effective than any attempt at progress could be in this respect. However, the process of abolishing capitalism must not be thought of as a "magical panacea", which would automatically resolve all forms of discrimination. Rather, it is a prerequisite,

in order to make a sustainable approach to this problem even possible. It is only when capitalism is abolished, the fight against discrimination is no longer a fight against windmills.

## **Conclusion**

1. Discrimination is based on chauvinism.
2. Chauvinism is an "inherited liability" of a society that lies on the structural level and creates the idea of human inequality.
3. The idea of human inequality becomes right-wing extremism when it is uninhibited.
4. It is set free by the catalysing effect of capitalism.

Discrimination depends on the structure in which it takes place. In society with its conventions, as well as in the capitalist order, which has penetrated the private life and minds of people. If discrimination were viewed simply as "something bad" in humans themselves, the causal reasons of discrimination would be ignored that make these humans the way they are. An often formulated, rarely observed formula: the sources of the problem should be tackled, not the symptoms. What does that mean in concrete terms? That is, it is good and important to act against discriminatory behaviors where they occur. But it is absolutely necessary to recognize that the systemic preconditions described in this text, as they

are present in most societies, are and will always produce and promote chauvinism. This brings us to the final conclusion that the system of bourgeois society is not - as is often thought - actually "right and good and just", and problems such as discrimination are but mere unrelated side-effects. Rather, the system itself is already at fault because it necessarily contains and reproduces these problems. If discrimination is to be abolished and the conditions for a fundamentally equitable society structure are to be achieved, then it is necessary to consider how a completely new system can be built - away from old burdens and without a capitalist order.