

# A mural of conflict

## On the tension between the critique of anti-Semitism and racism

### When good intentions turn sour:

It seems so simple: Racism is bad, anti-Semitism is bad. We care about social justice and strive for a society free of hate. Hence, we should think and fight both struggles together. In reality however, there are always disputes and incompatibilities between the advocates of these two ideologies. The heated discussion around the accusations of anti-Semitism at documenta 15 bears the brunt of it.

### The issue is complex:

Different historical and theoretical references, a variety of individual and collective identities as well as experience are at play. In order to effectively work against these two ideologies and their violent consequences in a constructive manner, one must acknowledge the complexity of their entanglements. It requires the recognition of both, their differences as well as their commonalities.

### Racism:

An in-group (implicit) is set as the norm constructing a so-called out-group based on origins, skin color, hair, name or language. The supposed Other is devalued as inferior, as being less intelligent, less enlightened, less civilized. This hierarchization enhances the value of one's own group (the in-group), which lays the groundwork for exercising power and domination over the supposedly inferior group. The racial hierarchy is also the source for the unequal distribution of resources. Historically, white European people have constructed themselves as a superior group, thereby justifying the (colonialist) exploitation of others. Until today the racist assumption of white superiority continues to have structural implications in our everyday lives: It negatively impacts the economic, social, cultural, and political participation and access of Black people and People of Color (BPoC). It also culminates in racially motivated violence and terror.

### Anti-Semitism:

In the process of establishing and securing the racial hierarchical order, anti-Semitism serves a similar function as racist ideologies. It constructs Jews as supposedly Other and assigns them as less valuable. The difference lies in the hierarchization: the in-group is constructed as inferior, the out-group as superior. Jewish people are constructed as richer, more powerful, more intelligent, and blamed for their own fate of persecution and exclusion. Anti-Semitism is an ideology that reduces complexity and personalizes abstract structures onto „the Jews“. Thus, it is a common pattern of anti-Semitic conspiracy theories that an alleged powerful Jewish elite runs the world. Anti-Semitism is an essential component of right-wing and Islamist ideologies, it goes hand in hand with historical revisionism or the denial of the Holocaust. It culminates in anti-Semitic hate crimes and terror. Moreover, Israel-related anti-Semitism and anti-Semitic conspiracy theories are also common phenomena in parts of the anti-imperialist left and in many countries of the global South.

### Conflict in the cultural sector:

In the (German) cultural sector i.e., the very place where artistic positions, knowledge and identities are negotiated and produced, a polarization between the struggle against racism and anti-Semitism has become increasingly prevalent in recent years. It is striking to see how the heated discussions around the issue fail to consider the complexity of multidimensional identities. Especially surrounding international cultural events, quarrels and accusations unfold between two supposedly homogenous groups: One group is constituted by supporters of post-colonial and critical-race studies and those in solidarity with Palestine, the other group of those fighting anti-Semitism and who stand in solidarity with Israel. Those on the fence or in-between are made invisible. The conflict has reached a sad climax in the midst of turmoil regarding the serious accusations of anti-Semitism at the international art exhibition documenta 15 in Kassel. Despite warnings and ongoing discussion about possible cases of anti-Semitism in the run-up to the opening, the exhibition management was unable to successfully navigate the fine line between artistic freedom and anti-Semitic depictions. We, the Anne Frank Educational Center, are deeply concerned about the growing rift between the two seemingly opposing fronts and worry that constructive dialogue is closing in. We see ourselves in a mediating role: It is necessary to create space in which racism and anti-Semitism in art and culture can be critically and openly discussed. Space, where discussion is held on the boundaries between legitimate criticism on Israel and harmful anti-Semitism. Let's finally start talking to and with each other!