



MASTERARBEIT | MASTER'S THESIS

Titel | Title

The Black Experience in the Austrian Education System
An Insight into Institutional Injustice

verfasst von | submitted by
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angestrebter akademischer Grad | in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of
Master of Arts (MA)

Wien | Vienna, 2025

Studienkennzahl lt. Studienblatt | Degree
programme code as it appears on the
student record sheet:

UA 066 824

Studienrichtung lt. Studienblatt | Degree
programme as it appears on the student
record sheet:

Masterstudium Politikwissenschaft

Betreut von | Supervisor:

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“Privilege is when you think something is not a problem because you aren’t affected personally” – David Gaider (narrative designer and writer)

Dedicated to the marginalized Black children
who have to struggle with racism in silence

Acknowledgments

I would like to express my sincere gratitude to my supervisor, Mag. Dr. Vedran Džihčić, whose expertise, patience, and constant support were essential to the completion of this thesis. I am deeply thankful for the valuable feedback, thoughtful critique and guidance you provided, which helped refine my research and kept me focused throughout this challenging process.

I would also like to extend my appreciation to Dr. Yuki Seidler, MA, MSc who played a crucial role in shaping my academic trajectory.

I am incredibly grateful to my interview partners for taking the time to grant me valuable access and insights into their life stories and their most vulnerable experiences.

A special thanks to my brother, who provided me with advice, and encouragement, particularly when the research process felt overwhelming. Your support was instrumental in helping me to stay motivated and on track.

My heartfelt thanks go to my family and friends, whose unwavering belief in me and emotional support throughout this entire journey were a constant source of strength.

Thank you.

Abstract

This master's thesis explores the various forms of racism that Black and African students experience in the Austrian education system. Through a qualitative method approach, using narrative interviews, the data was collected from twelve interview partners which included students, teachers and members of Black anti-racism organizations. The study found that racism within this context is present in many various ways. These findings suggest that not only fellow students, but also teachers and institutions play a key role, either consciously or subconsciously, when it comes to racism towards Black students. This research contributes to the growing body of literature on racism in Austria towards Black people, and people of the African community in Austria and also provides recommendations to minimize racism in the education system.

Abstrakt

Diese Masterarbeit untersucht die verschiedenen Formen von Rassismus, die Schwarze und afrikanische Studierende im österreichischen Bildungssystem erleben. Mithilfe eines qualitativen Forschungsansatzes wurden durch narrative Interviews Daten von zwölf Interviewpartner*innen erhoben, darunter Studierende, Lehrkräfte und Schwarze Antirassismus-Organisationen. Die Studie ergab, dass Rassismus in diesem Kontext in vielfältiger Weise präsent ist. Die Ergebnisse deuten darauf hin, dass nicht nur Mitschüler*innen und -studierende, sondern auch Lehrkräfte und Institutionen eine entscheidende Rolle spielen – sei es bewusst oder unbewusst – wenn es um Rassismus gegenüber Schwarzen Studierenden geht. Diese Arbeit leistet einen Beitrag zur wachsenden wissenschaftlichen Auseinandersetzung mit Rassismus gegenüber Schwarzen Menschen und der afrikanischen Community in Österreich und bietet zudem Empfehlungen zur Minimierung von Rassismus im Bildungssystem.

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1. Introduction

It is important to emphasize that the intent of this paper is to highlight the lived realities of Black children in educational settings, not to offend or target white individuals.

“Your German is really good!” or “I mean, where do you actually come from?” were statements I frequently heard while growing up. Additionally, questions often posed to me by my classmates included: “Do they even have drinking water or ‘real’ houses in Africa?” I was not aware that these experiences were not unique to me, but many Black children shared similar encounters during their school years.

The necessity to explore the topic of racism within the education system became apparent, when I was writing a paper for a pre-master thesis seminar and an interviewee shared their own school experience as a Black child, which was marked by discomfort and alienation, a sentiment echoed by many other members of the Austrian Black community.

As I began reviewing academic literature on the subject, I was struck by its scarcity, which seemed to suggest either that the issue was not significant or that it was not worthy of attention. My conversations with fellow white students highlighted their lack of awareness about the struggles Black children face in the Austrian education system. Meanwhile, discussions with Black students revealed a common feeling of being voiceless – often overlooked and unheard within the system. This stark contrast between perceptions led me to the realization that the topic warrants much deeper exploration.

The term Black is written with a capital B as it reflects a broader, collective identity rather than just a color or a physical characteristic. The term PoC is used to describe individuals who are not white.

The subsequent chapters will address various aspects of the research. Chapter 2 reviews the existing literature and current information on racism within the European education system, with a particular focus on the experiences of Africans and Black people. Chapter 3 provides a theoretical overview of the key concepts and frameworks pertinent to the study. Chapter 4 details the research methodology and the data collection process. Chapter 5 presents the findings from the interviews conducted. Chapter 6 offers

an analysis of these findings, followed by the conclusion. Finally, Chapter 7 summarizes the key insights and implications of the study.

The aim of this paper is to provide insight into the racism faced by Black individuals, particularly within the education system.

2. Theoretical Overview

To effectively address the research question, it is essential to establish a theoretical framework. This framework is designed to clarify key concepts, such as **racial discrimination**, **institutional racism**, and **structural racism** while providing a comprehensive overview of **racism** as a whole.

2.1 Racism

According to de Benoist (1999) racism is difficult to define as it has many different meanings that contradict themselves. He further elaborates that racism is a “*Schimpfwort*: a term with pejorative connotations, whose very use inevitably tends to be more *instrumental* than descriptive” (de Benoist, 1999, p.11). He also claims that the term has been generalized and overused meaning it has become a term with broad and sometimes excessive significance and weight. The overuse of the term on an international level makes the term seem unclear (de Benoist, 1999, p.11).

Racism tends to be associated with other ideologies or social problems such as “facism, the extreme Right, anti-Semitism, sexism etc.” (de Benoist, 1999, p.11). Since these terms share a certain similarity, they are often lumped together. Using the term *racism* as an overall umbrella for various forms of social and political offenses, oversimplifies the issue and prevents a deeper understanding of its specific dynamics.

Racism appeared in 1932 for the first time in the Larousse dictionary, which interpreted racism as “A system which affirms the superiority of one racial group over the others” (Larousse in: de Benoist, 1999, p.13).

In his publication, Grosfoguel (2016), interprets racism as

“a global hierarchy of superiority and inferiority along the line of the human that have been politically, culturally and economically produced and reproduced for

centuries by the institutions of the 'capitalist/patriarchal western-centric/Christian-centric modern/colonial world system' (Grosfoguel, 2016, p.10).

He goes into further detail and states that society categorizes people in ways that either grant or deny them their humanity, social recognition and access to rights, those being human, labor, civil and women rights. An invisible "line of the human" (Grosfoguel, 2016, p.10) is used as a metaphorical boundary that separates those who are fully recognized as human beings from those whose humanity is questioned or denied. Those who are seen as *under* the line of humanity face exclusion and dehumanization.

Moreover, racism is described as a global, hierarchical system that determines who is seen as fully human and who is seen as inferior, often based on race, ethnicity, religion and other markers. Racism is not just a Western issue but can be reproduced in other various cultural contexts. The criteria for deciding who is seen as *above* or *below* the line of humanity can shift, but the main significance is to deny the full humanity of certain groups (Grosfoguel, 2016, p.10).

Behrning et al. (2022) created a quote out of Stuart Hall's description of racism in Böhmer & Steffgen's (2022) book *Rassismus an Schulen*, which essentially summarize the above-mentioned history of racism.

„(...) [Rassismus ist eine Markierung von Unterschieden], welche es einer Gruppe ermöglicht, sich gegenüber anderen Menschen abzugrenzen und abzusetzen. Diese Markierung dient als Begründung für soziale, politische oder wirtschaftliche Handlungen, die in ihrer Folge bestimmten Gruppen den Zugang zu materiellen oder symbolischen Ressourcen verwehren und dadurch Privilegien für die ausschließende Gruppe erschaffen“ (Hall, 2004 in: Behrning et al., 2022, p.3&4). [translation see attachment]

This definition emphasizes that racism serves a specific purpose, such as restricting access to resources like language, housing, or legal rights. It constructs groups based on arbitrary criteria (e.g., skin color or religion), reinforcing racist ideologies and behaviors. Racist actions are not limited to physical violence but also include linguistic domination, such as exclusion, contempt, and aggression (Hinnenkamp, 1995 in: Behrning et al., 2022, p.5).

2.1.1 Racial Discrimination

According to the European Commission, racial discrimination is defined as

“Any distinction, exclusion, restriction or preference based on race, colour, descent, or national or ethnic origin which has the purpose or effect of nullifying or impairing the recognition, enjoyment or exercise, on an equal footing, of human rights and fundamental freedoms in the political, economic, social, cultural or any other field of public life” (European Commission, n.a.).

In summary, this definition defines the term *racial discrimination* as the unequal treatment of a person due to their race, skin color or descent. It is essential to mention that racial discrimination is a breach of human rights and fundamental freedoms.

The Equality and Human Rights Commission (n.a.) goes into further detail when it comes to the term racial discrimination. They state that the differential treatment does not “have to be intentional to be unlawful” (Equality and Human Rights Commission, n.a.). Moreover, they articulate that there are various types of race discrimination:

1. **Direct discrimination:** this occurs when a person in a related situation is being treated worse due to the color of their skin. An example for this situation would be a law enforcement officer stopping and searching an individual solely based on their race or color of skin and assuming that this person is more likely to be involved in criminal activity, despite not having no other reason for suspicion (Equality and Human Rights Commission, n.a.).
2. **Indirect discrimination:** this phenomenon appears when an organization has a specific policy or method that disadvantages individuals from a specific racial group. A situation that would describe this term would be a company implementing a policy that bans head coverings for all employees. This would indirectly discriminate against women who wear a hijab due to their religious beliefs (Equality and Human Rights Commission, n.a.).

However, the Equality and Human Rights Commission also states that indirect discrimination is permitted if “the organization or employer is able to show [...] that there is a good reason for the discrimination. This is known as objective justification” (Equality and Human Rights Commission, n.a.). They give an example of an asylum seeker not being eligible to open a bank account as they

do not fulfill the necessary requirements such as living in the UK for 12 months and having a permanent address. In this case indirect discrimination is justified for business reasons – to prevent fraud for example (Equality and Human Rights Commission, n.a.).

- 3. Harassment:** it materializes when “someone makes you feel humiliated, offended or degraded” (Equality and Human Rights Commission, n.a.). An example for this would be a Black student being subjected to racial jokes or derogatory comments about their race by fellow students and/or teachers (Equality and Human Rights Commission, n.a.).
- 4. Victimization:** when someone is treated poorly due to them making a complaint of race related discrimination. Supporting someone who has filed a complaint of race related discrimination can also suffer from victimization. Example: The above-mentioned student that is harassed by their fellow classmates and/or teachers reports a case of racial bullying to the school administration. After filing the report, the school investigates the incident, but instead of being supported, the teachers and administrators start treating the student differently – unfair grades, social isolation (Equality and Human Rights Commission, n.a.).

To summarize, there are multiple different forms a person can suffer from racial discrimination, and it is important to understand that racial discrimination is not only using racial slurs or discriminatory language (overt) but can also be indirect in forms of policies or victimization (covert).

2.1.2 Institutional Racism

Another form of racism, which is relevant when discussing racism in the education system, is *institutional racism*. Macpherson of Cluny (1999) gives a detailed definition of the term,

“The collective failure of an organisation to provide an appropriate and professional service to people because of their colour, culture, or ethnic origin. It can be seen or detected in processes, attitudes and behaviour which amount to discrimination through unwitting prejudice, ignorance, thoughtlessness and racist stereotyping which disadvantage minority ethnic people” (Macpherson of Cluny, 1999, 6.34).

This definition highlights that institutional racism can be subtle, unintended and systemic however, it still results in unequal treatment of people based on their race or ethnicity. In this case racism is not exercised by one person but by a whole institution – in this case the education system.

In addition, institutional racism, as described by Rommelspacher (2009), occurs within organizations such as, schools, law enforcement, and healthcare. These institutions rely on established norms and practices, often rooted in prejudices, rather than adapting to promote individuality, and equal opportunities (Rommelspacher, 2009 in: Behrning, 2022, p.10).

Institutional racism can be both implicit and explicit. Implicit racism includes actions that are not directly linked to racism but still result in discriminatory outcomes. An example for this would be the focus on majority society children in German schools, which makes it harder for children from refugee families to integrate. These practices often go unnoticed or unchallenged, even though they have a negative impact on certain groups (Hormel & Scherr, 2004 in: Behrning, 2022, p.11).

Explicit racism, in contrast, is openly acknowledged and directly related to racial prejudice, such as in administrative laws that apply equally but result in unequal opportunities for different groups (Hormel & Scherr, 2004 in: Behrning, 2022, p.11).

In summary, institutional racism can operate in subtle ways through established practices (implicit racism) or more overtly when an institution knowingly allows unequal treatment (explicit racism), especially when these practices impact marginalized groups disproportionately.

2.1.3 Structural Racism

Rommelspacher (2009) identifies structural racism as the as the exclusion of a group by societal systems and legal norms, which negatively affects their political and economic situation. It is not based on individual actions but rather embedded in the structure of society (Rommelspacher, 2009 in: Behrning, 2022, p.9).

Systemic racism is demonstrated by Wa Baile et al. (2019) through procedures such as arbitrary border control or police checks that are frequently predicated on *racial profiling*.

Black people or people of color are disproportionately the targets of these checks in public areas like streets, train stations, and retail malls. These checks are socially invisible as many people in society view them as necessary or acceptable. Structural racism in society is maintained by state institutions, such as the police, accepting discriminatory actions without question (Wa Baile et al., 2019 in: Behrning, 2022, p.10).

In conclusion, structural racism, refers to the systemic exclusion of marginalized groups through societal structures and legal norms, which adversely impact their political and economic positions. Structural racism is not about individual racist actions, but rather how society as a whole is set up in a way that keeps these groups at a disadvantage.

After defining the three most prevalent types of racism, the next chapter will focus on the methods utilized to answer the research question.

3. Racism in the Education System and in Austria – Current State of the Debate

This section of the paper reviews and analyzes existing literature on the topic, offering a comprehensive overview on the matter. Additionally, it provides a brief exploration of racism directed at Black people and Africans in Austria, as well as an examination of the African and Black experience within the Austrian education system to date.

3.1 History of Racism in the European Education System

It is important to showcase the situation of Black people in an historical context. This chapter will provide an insight into the educational context across multiple former colonial countries: Portugal, England, the Netherlands, and France as contrast to Austria, where the colonial history was not as present.

Carter (2022) gives a short overview on the European educational system in the twentieth century and how it coincides with racism. She mentions that *race*, as a socially constructed concept, is rooted in the legacy of European nation- and empire-building, meaning that European education systems have been influenced by racialized social structures stemming from Europe's complex imperial, post-colonial and authoritarian histories (Carter, 2022, p.3).

In Europe's colonies, education was used as a *civilizing* tool, aimed at addressing perceived racial deficiencies in indigenous populations. This changed after the second World War where Western democratic nations began adopting universal mass education systems domestically, promoting *equal* access to education for all. Amidst these shifts toward universal education and decolonialization, schools emerged as central spaces for race relations, ethnic conflict, and *multiculturalism* (Carter, 2022, p.3).

Colonial education policies not only provided unequal access to education but also shaped mindsets, upholding a racial hierarchy that privileged European identities and justified colonial rule. Colonial education policies in the 1800s and early 1900s were designed to reinforce racial hierarchies between European powers and their colonies. The countries mentioned as an example are Britain and Portugal (Carter, 2022, p.3).

Portugal, in the 1930's created an *imperial curriculum* in its schools, which was meant to strengthen public support for its empire by promoting pro-colonial views. The Portuguese education policies also established that Portuguese citizens should have access to a better education than indigenous African populations in the colonies, creating an educational hierarchy based on race and nationality (Carter, 2022, p.4).

Britain's colonial educational policies relied on missionary groups to provide education in the colonies. The focus was more on technical solutions for managing its colonies than on standardizing the existing education systems. However, education within Britain still indirectly supported the colonial project and reinforced racial hierarchies. Examples for that are *Empire Day*, which was celebrated in white settler colonies like Australia, New Zealand and Canada. *Empire Day* encouraged pride in the empire and promoting ideas of racial superiority within the education system. Colonial education assumed that white, metropolitan students were entitled to a superior education compared to colonized populations (Carter, 2022, p.4).

Carter mentions that people of Asian and African descent had lived in Europe for centuries, however, migration increased significantly in the latter half of the twentieth century due to being guest workers, refugees, Caribbean immigrants – who are also known as the *Windrush Generation* – who came to work in Britain in the late 1940s to work in the public sectors (Carter, 2022, p.4).

European countries responded to the presence of non-white students in different ways:

1. Assimilationist policies: France for instance promoted policies that emphasized unity in language and culture – which often downplayed the cultural backgrounds of immigrant students.
2. Multicultural policies: Britain for example embraced multicultural policies and encouraged the recognition and celebration of students' diverse practices in the 1980s.
3. Intercultural education: The European Union has advocated for intercultural education, especially in Italy, which promotes dialogue and understanding between different cultures within schools (Carter, 2022, p.4).

While these types of policies aimed to integrate diverse student populations, underlying racism and colonial attitudes persisted, affecting both students and teachers of color. Racial discrimination continued to exist in educational settings, some older colonial attitudes still influenced interactions in schools. In 1960s Paris, African children experienced harsher treatment compared to children from Antilles françaises (French West Indies) and in Britain, there were differing expectations based on race meaning, South Asian students were often seen as more academically capable than African-Caribbean students – especially in subjects such as math and science (Carter, 2022, p.4).

European schools have historically dealt with race and racism particularly through biased portrayals of non-European peoples and shifted towards Holocaust education to address issues of prejudice. French geography textbooks up to the 1960s portrayed Arab, Asian and African groups through negative and simplistic stereotypes that aligned with colonial attitudes. These materials reinforced colonial power structures by depicting non-Europeans as inferior (Carter, 2022, p.4).

Since the 1960s schools in the Netherlands have shown a trend of *color-blind racism*, which involves ignoring or denying the relevance of race in school settings. This approach avoids talking about racial differences or acknowledging race-based issues, even though students of color often report encountering racism in their daily school experiences (Carter, 2022, p.4).

From the 1990s onward, European education systems began to rely more on Holocaust education to combat racism. It has become a common way for schools to introduce students to the dangers of racism and anti-Semitism. While Holocaust education is intended to promote anti-racist values, often does not fully explore other forms of racism or relate current racial injustices to Europe's own colonial past. Students may not see how historical colonialism connects to modern racial issues (Carter, 2022, p.5).

In summary, Carter (2022) has managed to give a comprehensive depiction that racism in the current European education system is not a recent phenomenon but is deeply rooted in its colonial past and racist history and still carries on today.

3.2 Current Situation – How are Black People Treated in Present European Society?

The historical facts in other European countries as well as in their former colonial territories show a lack of educational opportunities for Black students. How has the situation in modern day Europe changed for Black people?

A statistic by created by the *European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights* (also known as FRA) published a report in 2023 on Black people and their experiences in the EU. They stated that approximately 50% Black people or people of African descent in the European Union “face racism and discrimination in their daily life” (FRA, 2023, p.1). Furthermore, they also show that it is a rise since 2016 and that racist harassment and ethnic profiling remain a widespread issue, particularly affecting young people. Over 6700 people of African descent across the EU participated in the survey. The countries included Austria, Belgium, Denmark, Finland, France, Germany, Ireland, Italy, Luxembourg, Poland, Portugal, Spain and Sweden (FRA, 2023, p.1).

While the report also focuses on various sections of life such as *racial discrimination, harassment, racial profiling, work and housing and poverty*, there is also a section on *education*. Here the study shows that young people of African descent are three times more likely to drop out of school early compared to the general youth population. Additionally, in 2022 more parents reported that their children were subjected to racism at school in 2016 (FRA, 2023, p.1).

Austria and Germany showed the highest rates of discrimination over the five years leading up to the survey (2019 and 2023). Austria: 76% in the five years before the survey was made and 67% in twelve months before the survey was made. Germany: 77% in the five years before the survey was made and 65% in the twelve months before the survey was made. In comparison, Finland (66% and 57%) and Denmark (61% and 47%) are behind Germany and Austria on the scale (FRA, 2023, p.27).

As the study highlights that Austria and Germany – which share a rather similar language and culture – have high reported incidents of discrimination towards people of African descent, the following two segments will display an overview on racism and racial discrimination towards immigrants and people of African descent.

3.2.1 Racism in the German Education System

An article written by Juang et al. (2022) addresses the lack of research in Germany and Europe on how youth experience and respond to racism, despite the longstanding existence of anti-racism initiatives, like the *Schools without Racism, Schools with Courage* movement. The movement was created in Belgium, in 1988, and has since expanded across other European countries. The campaign was adopted by the German school system in 1995 (Juang et al., 2022, p.2)

The need for schools, communities and societies to address racism is not a new realization. In fact, 81% of Germans consider racism to be a “big or “very big problem” (Deutsche Welle, 2018 in: Juang et al., 2022, p.2). A report published in 2023 by the *Federal Government Commissioner for Migration, Refugees, and Integration* and the *Federal Government Commissioner for Anti-Racism* has further elaborated on that statistic.

Their presentation of the 2020 *Afrozensus*, a “nationwide, non-representative quantitative survey” (Afrozensus, 2020 in: 2023, Federal Government Commissioner for Migration, Refugees, and Integration and the Federal Government Commissioner for Anti-Racism, p.30) aimed to highlight the varied experiences Black people, Africans and individuals of African descent in Germany. The Afrozensus report gathered sociodemographic data along with information on experiences of discrimination, levels of civic engagement and trust in organizations and institutions. Key findings from the

survey highlight the widespread nature of anti-Black racism in Germany, with the majority of respondents (94,1%) viewing it as either *very* or *quite widespread*. 20% of the surveyed individuals reported facing increased racism since the COVID-19 pandemic began. Discrimination was most often attributed to *race or ethnicity* (93,9%), *skin color* (91,5%), *gender* (52,5%) and other characteristics such as *name* or *appearance*. It is important to note that 77,8% of respondents stated that they had not reported their recent discrimination incidents. Only a minority turned to their employers (32,8%), the police (26,9%), a grassroots or community organization (15,7%) or an anti-discrimination counselling center (14,7%) (Afrozensus, 2020 in: Federal Government Commissioner for Migration, Refugees, and Integration and the Federal Government Commissioner for Anti-Racism, 2023, p.31).

When reporting their incidents with discrimination 74,1% of the 886 respondents who reported their discrimination incidents, voiced dissatisfaction with how their reports were handled. 25,7% formulated their satisfaction with the way their report was managed. 93,9% of all surveyed felt either disbelieved or labeled as overly sensitive when speaking about racism. Power dynamics such as a teacher-student relationship likely also contributed to underreporting, as individuals may fear negative consequences (Afrozensus, 2020 in: Federal Government Commissioner for Migration, Refugees, and Integration and the Federal Government Commissioner for Anti-Racism, 2023, p.32).

The *Federal Government Commissioner for Migration, Refugees, and Integration* and the *Federal Government Commissioner for Anti-Racism* (2023) made a significant claim that there is a growing need for studies in school-based discrimination, including issues like prejudice and “stereotype threat” (Federal Government Commissioner for Migration, Refugees, and Integration and the Federal Government Commissioner for Anti-Racism, 2023, p.50).

On the topic of racism in schools, the report also elucidated that teachers’ actions can influence students’ skill development even if unintentionally. A review of a 2018 University of Mannheim study found that trainee teachers graded primary students with Turkish names lower in German despite equal performance levels (Bonefeld & Dickhäuser, 2018, p.1). Research conducted by *Berliner Institut für empirische Integrations- und Migrationsforschung* also known as BIM (2017) showed that some

teachers tend to underestimate the abilities of students of Turkish descent, even when accounting for socio-economic-status and performance (BIM, 2017, p.31).

Juang et al. (2022) conclude that racism in the German education system is an issue that young people have already tried to combat in the 1980's. However, both developmental science researchers and policymakers have shown a limited response. According to the authors there is a lack of comprehensive, institutionalized body of research addressing current racism issues. They urge for a need to tackle this dilemma (Juang et al. 2022, p.2).

3.2.2 Racism in the Austrian Education System

An annual report from 2021 published by the Austrian organization IDB (Initiative for Discrimination-Free Education) presented that 121 cases of racism and discrimination reached their department in that year. These cases were all related to the education system. They have stated in their report that these numbers are under no circumstances representative of the actual situation in Austria, and that the estimated number of unreported cases is much higher. However, the displayed numbers are able to provide insight into what is going in the Austrian education system (IDB, 2021, p.7).

The reasons for discrimination are varied and comprised of ableism (6%), sexism (4%), sexual orientation (7%), antisemitism (1%) and racism (81%) and the perpetrators have been labeled as educators (38%), coaches (21%), not specified (19%), classmates (13%), structural racism (7%) and supervisor (2%). These statistics show that the main reason for discrimination in the Austrian education system is racism, and the main culprits are educators (IDB, 2021, p.7).

Data from the report also indicate that school children (45%) and students (35%) are the main victims. Furthermore, the majority of cases reported are from Vienna (27%) and Lower Austria (26%). They believe it is likely due to the fact that the headquarters of the organization is based in Vienna (IDB, 2021, p.8).

Forghani-Arani & Schaffer (2020) have given examples into what anti-black racism in the education system can look like. They have found that in the time between 2018 and 2019 the number of reported cases of discrimination has increased by more than 36%. Looking at a longer period since 2016, there is an even greater rise of 50%. Of all reported cases 93% had a racist context and nearly half involved Black students. They frequently

describe experiences of *othering* (Forghani-Arani & Schaffer, 2020, p.21). *Othering* is defined as “a process whereby individuals and groups are treated and marked as different and inferior from the dominant social group” (Oxford Reference, 2017).

Negative stereotypes dominate the portrayal of Black people in Austrian media which include headlines about drug-related crimes and their political exploitation by certain political parties. School textbooks also play a role when it comes to indirectly perpetuating stereotypes (Forghani-Arani & Schaffer, 2020, p.22).

The project AEWTASS – Advancing Education Within The Austrian School System released a scholarly analysis of 24 textbooks from the subjects of History, Social studies/Political Education and Geography/Economics in 2024. The paper is a detailed analysis of Austrian school textbooks, focusing on the representation of Africa, its societies and the African diaspora. They criticize stereotypical and reproductive portrayals while also aiming to foster an inclusive and accurate educational approach (AEWTASS, 2024a). In addition, the project also provides workshops for teachers, with the aim of correcting the depiction of Africa in school materials and unconscious bias (AEWTASS, 2024b).

They have found significant issues with the portrayal of Africa, its societies and Black individuals in Austrian school textbooks – something that Inou & Achaleke have already shown in 2010. Inou & Achaleke (2010) expressed that textbooks can influence how students form associations between specific continents, countries and their inhabitants. As such, textbooks can either encourage diverse perspectives on different groups of people or reinforce stereotypes. This can result in discrimination and exclusion of Africans and Black students (Inou & Achaleke, 2010, p.18).

Many of the findings of Inou & Achaleke in 2010 are still relevant and present today. To summarize, AEWTASS (2024) have found that Austrian school textbooks still promote a negative picture of Africa. The following two aspects, from a variety of examples, of the paper are there to give an insight into the current state:

1. Africa is frequently depicted as a homogenous and underdeveloped continent and hereby ignoring its diversity and achievements. Themes of poverty, conflict, disease are often emphasized which in return creates a negative image of the

continent. Black individuals are commonly portrayed in victim roles (AEWTASS, 2024, p.92-104).

2. Black students face challenges in identifying with the textbook material due to the absence of positive representation. Eurocentric portrayals create a dichotomy where European societies are positioned as advanced and superior, reinforcing stereotypes and biases among students (AEWTASS, 2024, p.17).

Ziermann-Österreicher (2019) and Aping et al. (2022), have also discussed the current degrading state of the African depiction in Austrian school textbooks. Staber (2023) has focused on how schools deal with racist acts and Gomis (2021) looked at institutional racism in schools.

The statistics showcased above and the display of some of the derogatory contents in Austrian school books, prove that racism in the Austrian education system is still present. The aim of this paper is to give a better understand of the racism that Black students, African students and students of African descent go through when attending an educational institute in Austria.

3.3 Africans in Austria: A Short Overview

Prior to analyzing the content of the qualitative interviews, it is essential to provide a brief historical overview of Africans and Black people in Austria. This overview will illuminate their portrayal and treatment in Austrian society during the 1980s and 1990s, while also tracing the evolution of societal attitudes toward this demographic over time. Establishing this historical context is crucial for understanding the experiences of Black students within the Austrian education system.

3.3.1 Africans as a Homogenous Group: A Misconception

In contrast to other groups with a migration background, whose identity is shaped by a shared affiliation with a nation-state or religion, this common element does not apply to the Black community in Austria.

Although African people are often still perceived as a homogeneous group (Aping et al., 2024), Ebermann (2002) already argued that the cultural norms and values within the African population, which can be referred to as ‘mentalities,’ are, in fact, multifaceted and

layered (Ebermann, 2002, p.11). The diversity of these ‘mentalities’ arises from various historical processes. For instance, in Kenya the Kikuyu faced displacement, cultural pressure, and colonial influences like consumerism and Christianity. In contrast, the nomadic Maasai resisted colonization, preserving their traditions, independence, and unique beliefs, including male land ownership (Ebermann, 2002, p.11).

Ebermann reflects on the broader diversity among African cultures and nations, pointing to differences in size, population, traditions, and religious and cultural practices (Ebermann, 2002, p.11). Through this, the author underscores Africa’s vast cultural complexity, challenging any oversimplified generalizations about the continent or its people.

3.3.2 History of Africans in Austria

Sauer (2007) asserts, while Austria did not have a colonial empire, that there were early interactions with Africans, primarily through enslaved individuals brought to serve during the Habsburg monarchy. These individuals played various roles, often helping to build economic strategies, advising leaders, and contributing to communities (Sauer, 2007, p.12).

According to Sauer & Wiesböck (2007), about 100-200 people with African descent lived in Austria between the 17th and 18th century – most were slaves and forced to come to Austria (Sauer & Wiesböck, 2007, p.23). In the 18th century, Black individuals, particularly men, were present at Austrian princely courts, often serving as *symbols of representation and display*. The stereotypical image of *the serving Black person* had persisted in Europe for so long, that it eventually came to be seen as part of the *natural* social order (Sulzbacher, 2007, p.103). Apart from domestic service, the entertainment industry started to represent another key area of employment for *exotic* individuals in the 19th century. Their African facial features and their dark skin were the attracting factors for the Austrian entertainment industry. Africans were welcomed as clowns, comedians, singers and performers. Cheerfulness was the European perception of the African man and woman. The small Black population was seen as a decorative element within Austrian society. According to the author, within the last third of the 19th century, it was popular for Africans to make their money with *Menschenschauen*, which can be translated as *people*

watching or *human zoos*. Africans and Black people were the main attractions in these human zoos all across Europe, including Austria (Sulzbacher, 2007, pp.106-107).

The Ashanti people, among other peoples, were an attraction in the Wiener Tiergarten at Prater. The zoo administration created *villages* in which the African peoples would live in. The audience was not only able to observe the people up close, but also watched them in their *everyday* lives. In the village, the inhabitants cooked, ate, prayed, learned, gave birth, and eventually died (Schwarz, 2021, p.311). Social integration was no longer a viable possibility for Africans in Austria, as they were now reduced to display items (Sulzbacher, 2007, p.107).

This is further evidenced by Angelo Soliman, who is widely recognized today as a respected figure in 18th-century Viennese society. Although little is known about his childhood and adolescence, it is believed that he was abducted from Africa as a child and brought to Europe (Wigger & Hadley, 2020, p.81). He worked as a courtier to Prince Wenzel von Liechtenstein and wore elaborate robes embroidered with silver and gold, paired with an ornate Turkish saber. This attire symbolized Ottoman luxury and power while reflecting subordination to the Liechtenstein domain and Habsburg state (Morrison, 2011, p.361).

Soliman was a highly educated, multilingual Christian who became a respected figure in 18th-century Viennese society. He served as an educator at the court, undertook various duties, and reportedly developed a personal bond with Emperor Franz Joseph, including playing chess together. (Wigger & Hadley, 2020, p.81).

“After his death, the imperial natural history collection displayed Soliman’s body to the public. His skin, stretched over a wooden mold, was dressed in feathers and cowry shells. His tattooed thighs were on display, and he no longer wore a turban to cover his curly grey hair. This final outfit told the story of an African whose contribution to humanity was reduced to his utility as an object of display in the Habsburg imperial and monarchical palace” (Morrison, 2011, p.361)

The quote indicates that Soliman was skinned, taxidermized and displayed for the public to see, further proving that he was not viewed as an equal but as an exotic Black man and lesser than.

Between the fall of the Habsburg Empire and the outbreak of World War II, the African community in Austria remained small and largely absent from public records. During times of National Socialism, the general perception of Black people changed drastically – Africans were no longer seen as interesting and exotic, but rather as an inferior race, labeled as the enemy, and even put into concentration camps. One of the key systematic acts of persecution against people of color in the Third Reich, was the forced sterilization of children born to German women and Black soldiers from the Allied occupying forces in the Rhineland. Furthermore, the vast majority of Africans living in Germany, classified as *Deutsche Schutzbefohlene* or *protected persons* (i.e. subjects of German colonial rule), held German identification documents or passports but not Reich or state citizenship. Their documents were seized and replaced with foreign passports, severely impacting their residency rights and mobility. Simultaneously, job opportunities worsened significantly, as more companies, either under pressure from the German Labor Front, or out of excessive compliance, dismissed Black employees. In many cases, Africans and Afro-German children were banished from schools and others of African descent were excluded from society (Czech, 2007, p.155 - 157).

“An important concern of the Nazi authorities was to push out “foreign races” from the public space or to restrict them to precisely defined roles. This particularly affected the considerable number of blacks who worked as actors, musicians, artists, etc whose earning potential has become increasingly restricted” (Czech, 2007, p.161).

In the 1990s, propaganda by the right-wing party, FPÖ, started to become popular. Right-wing populism succeeds by channeling emotions like fear, resentment, and nostalgia into powerful political narratives that make people feel heard and valued, especially those experiencing social and economic insecurity. To effectively counter this, progressive movements must go beyond facts and logic, instead connecting emotionally with people’s everyday experiences and offering inclusive, hopeful alternatives (Wodak, 2018). Africans and Austro-Africans were the targets of xenophobia and racial discrimination during and after the party’s election campaign. Migrants from Africa, who were the smallest groups of foreigners in Austria, were subject to criminalization. They

were labeled as drug dealers by the media, and some died in police custody (Sauer, 2007, p.189).

The most notorious case of police violence towards a Black man, that ended in death, was that of Marcus Omofuma. A Nigerian asylum seeker, who died in 1999 during his deportation on a flight from Vienna to Sofia, after his application for asylum was denied. Medical reports later confirmed that his death aboard the plane resulted from restrictive restraints and the partial obstruction of his airways with duct tape. The three police officers involved were convicted in 2002 of negligent homicide and received suspended sentences. Since the mid-1990s, human rights groups had documented police violence against Black individuals, fueled by tabloid narratives depicting Africans as drug dealers and anti-immigrant campaigns by the Austrian Freedom Party (FPÖ), which had strong police support. Targeted policing measures, such as a 1996 dragnet investigation against *Black drug dealers*, increased racial profiling. Shortly after Omofuma's death, in May 1999, authorities launched Operation Spring, a large-scale operation that predominantly targeted Black people (Sauer, 1999a).

Operation Spring was the largest police operation in the history of the Second Republic at that time – it is currently the second largest police operation. It targeted around 100 suspected African drug dealers, many of whom were later proven innocent. This operation, leaked in advance to the FPÖ by a police official, was accompanied by anti-foreigner rhetoric, including an FPÖ newspaper ad reading *Powerless against 1000 Nigerians*. Following their xenophobic election campaign, the FPÖ became Austria's second largest party in 1999, and they entered government in 2000 (Sauer, 1999b), further discriminating against people of African descent in public spaces (Preglau, 2023, p.15)

The global Black Lives Matter movement resonated in Austria, leading to nationwide protests in 2020 against racism and police brutality. These demonstrations, involving 50,000 participants in Vienna, underscored the community's resilience and the broader society's support for racial equality (Inou et al., 2021).

Throughout the years, the Austrian Black community has experienced challenges, built supportive networks, and actively advocated for systemic change. The Black Voices Volksbegehren, established in 2022, an anti-racist citizens' initiative in Austria aiming to

improve and strengthen the institutional, representational, health, educational, labor-related, and socio-economic position of Black people, people of African descent, and People of Color through constitutional measures. A member of the Black Voices club provides anti-racism workshops for teachers, in cooperation with the Sprachförderzentrum Wien. (blackvoices.at, 2022a; BMI, 2022; Black Voices, 2022b).

The 2024 parliamentary elections saw the far-right Freedom Party (FPÖ) gain significant traction, promoting anti-migrant and anti-Islam policies. This shift raised concerns about the normalization of racism and its potential impact on Austria's Black and Muslim communities (Waldmüller, 2024).

Spanbauer (2020) discusses the history and experiences of Black people in Austria, highlighting their status as a minority group often overlooked in terms of representation and statistics. The article highlights activism and the formation of various groups, such as student unions, which worked to improve the conditions and visibility of Black communities in Austria. It also emphasizes the diversity of Black communities, with people from different African nations contributing to the broader social and political landscape in the country (Spanbauer, 2020).

In her article *Schwarze Menschen in Österreich in widerständischen Kontexten* provides Spanbauer (2022) a chronological overview of Black resistance in Austria. She emphasizes that although Austria did not have overseas colonies, it was complicit in European colonial ideologies. Austrian institutions, including universities and museums, contributed to racist theories and benefited from colonial exploitation. The public sphere absorbed these colonial racial hierarchies, shaping perceptions of Black people in Austria, while Austrian laws and policies often exclude Black individuals from full participation in society. She examines the historical and ongoing struggles of Black individuals against systemic racism and discrimination, highlighting their efforts to assert their rights and identities. Spanbauer's research and publications, such as *Blackening Vienna – Aspekte afrikanischer Präsenz in Wien seit 1918* (Sauer & Spanbauer 2022), further explore the presence and impact of African diaspora communities in Vienna.

3.4 Racism and the Current Situation in Austria

This chapter will focus on racism Black people face in Austria and 13 other countries in the EU. The data in this chapter will heavily focus on a report published by the European Union Agency For Fundamental Rights (2023) – in short FRA. It is convenient to also look and analyze other countries within Europe to get an understanding of where Austria lies within the EU, when it comes to racism towards Black people.

A quote by Sandanasamy, a legal advisor for ZARA (a civil courage and anti-racism project), in an Amnesty International (2023) article has summed up the racism predicament, that is currently occurring in Austria, “in Austria there is a fundamental lack of awareness that systemic and institutional racism exists” (AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL, 2023).

The quote highlights a significant challenge in Austria, namely that the structural nature of racism may not be fully understood or acknowledged. A lack of awareness around systemic and institutional racism prevents meaningful and necessary discussions and reform in a way that can address the underlying causes of racial inequality.

The report published by the European Union Agency For Fundamental Rights (2023) gave an insight into the overall experiences of Black people in the EU. The survey aimed to gather data on discrimination experienced by respondents in various aspects of life. It asked whether individuals felt discriminated against based on factors like skin color, ethnic origin, religion, sex, age, disability, sexual orientation, gender identity, or other grounds. The survey focused on key areas such as employments, health, housing, education, interactions with public services, and access to venues like nightclubs, restaurants, and public transport. The respondents were also asked if they experienced discrimination on multiple grounds. Those who reported discrimination in the last 12 months were asked about the frequency of these incidents and whether they had been reported. The survey collected information on whether or to whom these incidents were reported and reasons for not reporting (FRA, 2023, p.26).

The survey showed that people of African descent most frequently report discrimination based on skin color and ethnic or immigrant background across 14 EU Member States surveyed, which includes Austria. In the 12 months prior to the survey, 28% experienced

discrimination due to skin color and 22% due to their ethnic or immigrant background. Over the past five years, these figures rose to 38% skin color and 30% for ethnic or immigrant background (FRA, 2023, p.33).

Respondents of African descent also reported discrimination based on age, religion, and sex/gender, but the findings varied significantly between countries. For religion, the highest rates of discrimination in the 5 years before the survey were in Denmark (16%) and Austria (14%), followed by Finland (11%), Germany and Sweden (10%). In terms of age, 15% of respondents in both Austria and Luxemburg reported discrimination, followed by 13% in Germany. For sex/gender discrimination, 12% of respondents in Austria, 11% in Germany, and 10% in Denmark reported such experiences (FRA, 2023, p.33).

The findings related to Austria provide several important insights into the nature and extent of discrimination experienced by people of African descent, as they face significant levels of discrimination, particularly based on race, ethnic background, religion and age, which further underlines the statement made by Sandanasamy. In comparison to the other surveyed EU Member States, Austria shows a higher prevalence of discrimination for people of African descent.

3.4.1 Hate Crimes

Oxford City Council defines a hate crime as follows,

“Hate crime is any criminal offence motivated by prejudice. It can manifest as physical assault, offensive graffiti, verbal abuse, offensive literature, criminal damage or abusive gestures. Hate crimes may be driven by prejudice against:

- *race, colour, ethnic origin, nationality or national origins*
- *religion*
- *gender or gender identity*
- *sexual orientation*
- *disability”* (Oxford City Council, 2024).

The FRA (2023) have found in their surveys that on average, 41% of respondents of African descent experienced harassment in the five years before the survey, and 33% reported harassment in the 12 months before the survey. The highest rates of racist harassment in

the past five years were in Germany (54%) and Finland (52%), with over 40% of respondents in Austria (46%) and Ireland (44%) also reporting harassment. The lowest rates were in Portugal with 10% (FRA, 2023, p.57).

The acts of harassment experienced included

“offensive or threatening comments in person, threats of violence in person, offensive gestures or inappropriate staring, offensive or threatening emails or text messages (Short Messaging Service), offensive comments made about them online” (FRA, 2023, p.57)

23% of surveyed people who are parents, reported that their children faced racist harassment and bullying at school. The highest rates are in Austria, Finland, Germany and Ireland with almost 40% (FRA, 2023, p.56).

When it comes to the perpetrators, 68% of victims of racist harassment did not know the perpetrator. Most identified perpetrators were from work or educational settings (16%). 15% of women identified their neighbors as perpetrators compared to 7% of men. It was also mentioned that right-wing/racist groups (5%), or public officials (4%) and police/border guards (3%) were identified. Furthermore, 65% of incidents involved perpetrators without an ethnic minority background, 29% had a minority background different from the victim's and 6% shared the victim's background (FRA, 2023, p.63).

The majority of racist harassment victims, a total of 87%, stated that they did not report the incident. Among those who did, 44% reported to the police. However, 77% were dissatisfied with the response. Furthermore, the reporting rates were slightly higher for women (14%) than for men (10%). Muslims (8%) were less likely to report compared to other religious groups or non-religious individuals (14%). Another interesting aspect is, almost half (47%) of respondents did not report racist harassment because they believed it would not make a difference. This belief was more common among men (50%) than women (45%) and was highest among younger people, which made up 56%. About one-third (32%) felt the incident was too minor or too frequent to report, with 36% of men holding this view, compared to 28% of women who shared the same view. In addition, 20% of respondents found the report process too bureaucratic or time-consuming (FRA, 2023, p.63-64).

3.4.2 Racist Violence

The survey examined experiences of racially motivated physical violence, including actions like hitting, pushing, kicking, or grabbing, and the victims also shared the emotional, psychological, and socioeconomic impacts of the most recent racist physical attack.

In the past year, 2% of respondents experienced racist violence, with the highest rates in Finland (6%) and 5% in both Germany and Austria. Nearly one-third of all surveyed victims faced recurring incidents, more commonly men (38%) than women (19%). 70% of victims experienced one incident, with women reporting this more often (81%) than men (62%), while men were more likely to face multiple incidents. Additionally, 4% reported six or more attacks. Those wearing traditional or religious clothing (6%) and younger individuals, aged 16 – 44, were at a higher risk of experiencing racist violence, than those who do not wear traditional or religious clothing (3%) and individuals over the age of 45 years old (2%) (FRA, 2023, p.66).

Being a victim of violence can have severe and lasting effects on victims, impacting their safety, health and behavior. Among respondents who experienced such violence, 61% reported psychological issues like depression or anxiety, and 22% were afraid to leave their homes. Nearly one-third (31%) suffered injuries that didn't require medical care, while 12% needed medical assistance or hospitalization (FRA, 2023, p.67).

Women (71%) were more likely than men (51%) to report psychological issues, such as depression or anxiety, following racist violence. 35% of respondents expressed concern about verbal harassment or physical attacks in public and 42% were worried about inappropriate staring or offensive gestures. Worries about experiencing racist harassment or violence were most common in Germany, Finland and Austria, where 70% of respondents expressed such concerns, aligning with these countries' high rates of racist harassment. 14% of respondents avoid places like shops, cafes, or public transport. The highest rates were in Germany (30%), Finland (29%), Ireland (29%), and Austria (27%), while the lowest were in Spain (7%), France (10%), and Italy (12%) (FRA, 2023, pp.68-69).

Only 36% of victims of racist violence reported the incident to the police, with 58% of them satisfied with the response, while just 1% contacted victim support organizations. The main reason for not reporting (36%) was the belief that it would not make a difference. Other reasons for not reporting the incidents included bureaucratic challenges (19%), distrust or fear of the police (16%), and lack of knowledge about where to report (15%), all of which have increased since 2016 (FRA, 2023, p.67).

3.4.3 Racial Profiling by Police

The survey asked respondents about their experience with police stops, including whether they felt they were stopped, searched, or questioned because of their ethnic or immigrant background (FRA, 2023, p.72).

The survey reveals significant variations in police stop rates across the 13 EU Member States. 26% of respondents were stopped by police at least once in the past 5 years, an 12% in the past year. Austria had the highest stop rates with 40% in 5 years and 21% in the past year. Germany had the second highest stop rate in the past 5 years (33%), while Ireland had the highest rate in the past year (15%). Over the past 5 years, men of African (38%) descent were nearly three times more likely to be stopped by the police than women (13%). Overall, men were more likely to be stopped than women in all countries surveyed during both periods (FRA, 2023, p.73).

Among respondents of African descent who were stopped in the past 5 years, 41% were stopped in a car, 38% in the street and only 8% on public transport. There are notable country differences in where respondents of African descent were stopped. Finland with 66% and Portugal with 61% had the highest rates of stops in cars, while Spain (58%) and Belgium (41%) had the highest rates of stops on the street. Germany and Austria, 17% and 11%, had the highest rates of stops on public transport (FRA, 2023, p.75).

An advisor for the anti-racism project ZARA – civil courage and anti-racism work – stated that police cases, especially those involving complaints or misconduct, require significant consultation and attention. However, they often do not result in meaningful outcomes for the people affected. In many cases, investigations into these complaints are dropped or ended without action. One of the reasons for this is that there is no independent body or organization, separate from the police force, to investigate these

complaints. This lack of an external, unbiased authority means that complaints are not always properly addressed or pursued (Flug in: ZARA, 2023, p.11).

In conclusion, the findings suggest that Austria, along with other EU countries, still has significant challenges in addressing racism, particularly systemic racism, which particularly affects the daily lives of people of African descent. The lack of effective reporting mechanisms and the widespread nature of discrimination and violence contribute to ongoing racial inequality.

4. Method and Data Collection

This research aimed to explore the racism experienced by Black students and students of African descent in Austria. To address the research question, qualitative methods were employed, specifically autobiographical narrative interviews (see Skinner 2012).

In this section, the chosen analysis method of qualitative content analysis is to be presented and justified, following a three-step process. The process began with the inductive formation of codes based on the existing transcribed material. In the second step, categories, including subcategories, were formed based on the generated codes. Finally, a more detailed analysis was conducted using the developed category system – the entirety of the created categories (Atteslander, 2010, p.203). A detailed presentation of the analysis process carried out will be provided in the next chapter.

First, it should be noted that the literature consistently refers to inductive category formation rather than inductive coding (Mayring, 2016, pp.114-115; Kuckartz, 2022, pp.70-71; Atteslander, 2010, pp.203-204). It is always suggested that material should be coded based on developed categories. For example, Kuckartz (2022, p.71) states: “A characteristic of content analysis as a whole is that the entire material is coded, meaning it is systematically processed based on a category system.” An exception to this is Grounded Theory, which, as a distinct research approach, places codes at the center or even considers the entire analysis process as coding. This approach specifically focuses on generating theories and developing concepts. The fact that the term "code" in the relevant German literature is often translated as "category" does not make things any easier (Kuckartz, 2022, p.87).

Kuckartz (2022, p.106) suggests the following workflow for qualitative content analysis: His model follows a cyclical structure, indicating an iterative approach to analyzing qualitative data. The process includes the following steps:

1. Research Questions (Forschungsfragen): The central element of the analysis, guiding the entire process.
2. Text Work, Data Exploration (Textarbeit, Daten explorieren): Initial examination of the data, identifying key themes or patterns.
3. Forming Categories (Kategorien bilden): Developing conceptual categories to classify data systematically.
4. Coding Data (Daten codieren): Assigning codes to segments of data based on predefined categories.
5. Analyzing Coded Data (Codierte Daten analysieren): Interpreting the coded information to derive insights.
6. Presenting Results (Ergebnisse darstellen): Summarizing findings and drawing conclusions (Kuckartz 2022, p.106).

This model was modified in the present study by starting with Step 3, "Coding Files," while the first part – which, for example, involves highlighting important text passages or writing memos – was omitted entirely. The second step presented here, "Forming Categories," was carried out after coding. The rest of the process follows the circular model described above, which, as Kuckartz (2022, p.106) describes as far less linear than in a classical research process.

In general, Kuckartz (2022, pp.90-91) recommends a six-step guideline for inductive category formation, which can also be applied in a partially circular manner: 1. definition of category formation goals based on the research question, 2. determination of category types and abstraction levels, 3. review of data and specification of coding scope, 4. sequential coding of texts with assignment or creation of categories, 5. organization and systematization of the category system and, 6. finalization of categories and establishment of definitions.

To facilitate understanding of this guideline, Kuckartz (2022, p.94) suggests two practical implementation approaches. The first approach is the focused summary, which is particularly recommended for inexperienced coders. It closely follows the text, summarizes text passages in terms of content, and often leads to the early formation of categories. The second approach is open coding, in which codes are developed directly from the material without first summarizing the content. The choice of approach and the progression of the process will be described in the next section.

4.1 Analysis

Coding and category formation are integral components of the analysis, representing distinct analytical tasks that require detailed presentation within the research report (Kuckartz 2022: 102). The following section outlines the process of qualitative content analysis, employing an inductive approach to code and category formation.

Once an interview was transcribed, the transcript was thoroughly reviewed to gain a deeper understanding of the content. This step was considered essential, as repeated readings allowed for the identification of key information and the emergence of two to three main themes. To ensure a comprehensive and accurate representation of the underlying meaning, a detailed coding approach was adopted, along with a more extensive use of paraphrases. This enabled the meaning to be captured through the codes even without the accompanying text.

In line with Kuckartz's (2022, p.96) recommendations, longer responses were coded in meaningful units, while shorter, keyword-based answers were grouped according to related terms. Since the categories were developed afterward, using all the codes as a reference, some brief responses required additional clarification to fully capture the meaning and context of the code.

Interviewer: Würdest du sagen, dass du alleine warst, oder dass du einsam warst?

Partner: Ja, beides. [translation see attachment]

The response was coded as *expressing feelings of isolation and loneliness*, as the brief nature of the answer provided insufficient context to clarify its meaning.

Once all the codes were established, the process of category formation began. The categories were created inductively, drawing from the existing codes, starting with the identification of main categories that differed thematically. Given that the interview followed a guideline-based format, many of the categories naturally reflected the key elements of the guideline. However, the inductive approach also allowed for the emergence of new categories. Related categories were consolidated into broader, more general ones. In total, four main categories were developed, encompassing 40 subcategories. Codes that were deemed irrelevant to the research question were assigned to a separate category.

4.2 The Qualitative Interview

The qualitative approach was chosen as it provides a detailed insight into the individual experiences of the interviewees during their time in the Austrian education system.

[...] the method also frequently generates a useful reflective space for interviewees, allowing them to express, communicate and work through painful or confusing past experiences (Skinner, 2012, p.107).

As Salmona et al. (2019) state, “high-qualitative data analysis involves uncovering and constructing credible connections between the research questions and data” (Salmona et al. 2019, p.107). Schwandt (2015) describes data analysis as “the activity of making sense of, interpreting, and theorizing data (Schwandt, 2015, p.57)”. In other words, data analysis involves interpreting, explaining, and developing theories to understand the broader meaning of the data, ultimately transforming raw information into actionable insights. The autobiographical narrative approach is particularly valuable for this research question, as a structured interview would restrict participants from fully expressing their personal feelings and experiences.

4.3 Interview Partner Selection

The interview partners were recruited through personal connections, WhatsApp groups, and acquaintances. To be eligible for participation, individuals had to meet the following criteria:

1. Participants must be Black or of African descent, meaning at least one parent must be of African descent or Black.

2. They must have spent time in the Austrian education system. It does not matter whether they moved to Austria for university or attended only school in Austria.
3. Fluency in German is required to ensure that any biases experienced are due to their *African heritage* rather than a language barrier.
4. While intersectional factors such as social class, religion, sexual orientation, and gender may arise during the interviews, the primary focus of this research is the participants' experiences as Black or African individuals.
5. All participants are over the age of 18 and provided informed consent before sharing their experiences.

The interviewees included representatives from two Black organizations focused on combating anti-Black racism in Austria – AWETASS (<https://aewtass.org>) and D!SRUPT (<https://www.disruptverein.at>). They were selected to provide an organizational perspective on efforts to address racism in the Austrian education system. Additionally, two professionals working in the education sector and eight Black individuals (three men and five women) were interviewed about their personal experiences with racism. Most of the face-to-face interviews were conducted on the campus of the University of Vienna.

4.4 Data Collection

As mentioned earlier, the data was collected through autobiographical narrative interviews (Svasek & Domecka 2012), guided by an interview framework. The interviews were conducted between early July and late August 2024, with most taking place in person, except for two conducted via Google Meet. Interview durations ranged from 40 minutes to 2.5 hours, depending on how much participants shared in response to each question.

The interviews were recorded using a microphone and the voice memo app on a computer, while Google Meet interviews were recorded via mobile phone due to technical issues with laptop recording. After completion, the interviews were transcribed using Microsoft Word's dictation function, then proofread and corrected for accuracy. Interviews conducted in Austrian dialect were transcribed into standard German.

To protect participants' identities, names and identifying details – such as school names, teachers, classmates, and locations – were removed.

4.5 Qualitative Data Analysis

According to Flick (2017), the analysis of qualitative data can serve several purposes. He mentions three main intentions. The first aim could be to describe a particular phenomenon. This could involve exploring the personal experiences of an individual or a group. A study could focus on understanding the unique characteristics of a specific case and the relationships between those features. The analysis can also compare multiple cases to identify commonalities or differences between them. The second aim can be to identify the underlying factors that explain these differences, essentially seeking to understand why some cases are more successful than others. Lastly, the analysis can aim to develop a theoretical framework for the phenomenon being studied, based on the empirical data collected. (Flick, 2017, p.386).

In short, qualitative analysis can help describe, explain or theorize about human experiences or behaviors, often through comparing cases and identifying underlying factors.

As mentioned before, the transcripts were coded and categorized. Coding serves as an initial step to organize the data and prepare it for interpretation, since interpretation is the central task in qualitative data analysis. Interpretation involves understanding and explaining the meaning of the data, whether it is directly stated or implied and needs further exploration (Flick, 2014, p.391).

5. Results: Us – Them and Me

The aim of this chapter is to present the findings of this thesis. As outlined in the previous section, content analysis was employed to organize and evaluate the data gathered from the interviews. The interview statements were distilled to highlight key details and assigned specific codes. In the subsections, the related thematic codes will be presented. To ensure smooth readability, quotes from the interview transcripts have been translated from German to English. To protect their identities, the participants of the interviews will be referred to as IP1 – IP10.

This chapter is divided into four sections namely, 1. *A divided us: social setting*, 2. *Them: racism*, 3. *Me: identity and impact*, and 4. *Me and Them: a harmonious coexistence?*, to display the multiple, different stages a Black child experiences in the education system.

5.1 A Divided Us: Social setting

This chapter aims to give an insight into the atmosphere, in which the interview partners have been subjected to during their educational career. Moreover, it will also display the interview partners relationships and encounters with their teachers, classmates and the role parents and family play.

5.1.1 Being Black in an Educational Institution

Being the only Black person in class, the grade level, or even the entire school, are factors that have repeatedly come up throughout several interviews, which is explained by the minority status of Africans and Black people living in Austria in general. In one case, IP6 has mentioned that she is almost the only person with an ethnic background in her course at university,

“I think I am the only Black Person there, that I know of. There is another student who has a Turkish background. Actually, there are two students with a Turkish background thorough the entire course. And we are around 120 students (Interview, IP6).

IP5 acknowledged that after completing elementary school and moving to Vienna from a different Austria city, she found herself in a more diverse class which included two Black classmates.

Besides mostly being the only Black students, the interviews have also shown that there is a lack of diversity within the teaching and lecturing staff, with the exception of one person (Interview, IP1) having three teachers with an ethnic background throughout her time in school.

A result of being the only minority or Black student often leads to loneliness, which will be analyzed in an upcoming chapter.

5.1.2 Relationships with Classmates

The data shows, that the relationships between the interviewees and their fellow classmates varies. Some students had good or simple relationships with their classmates (Interview, IP1, IP2, IP5, IP6) while others struggled to fit in or had a hard time connecting with their classmates (Interview, IP7, IP8, IP9, IP10).

Examples of difficult experiences include struggling to get along with most classmates, facing challenges in effective communication, or frequently being involved in confrontations (Interview, IP10). Being subjected to physical violence and racist verbal abuse are additional factors that negatively impact the positive relationships in a classroom (Interview, IP8).

IP7 commented on an ambivalence when talking about the relationship between her and her classmates. At school she would be racially abused but after school, her bullies would go to her house, or they would invite her to their house and play. This example will be elaborated on in another category (Interview, IP7).

Having classmates from diverse ethnic backgrounds can help Black students build friendships more easily, as IP2 recalls, who found it easier to make friends with people with an ethnic background at her university. IP8 had a similar experience during his high school years,

I was very happy to make friends with other Black kids during high school. I am still very happy about them, and I am very grateful to them for talking to me, giving me advice, being there for me, and spending time together with me here and there (Interview, IP8).

IP9 explained why forming friendships with people from diverse ethnic backgrounds tends to be easier, “We know what it feels like to be different, and we know what it’s like to be seen through different eyes, so to speak” (Interview, IP9). Without the help and support of some of his classmates, he believes he would not have continued his education and discontinued going to school. Attending a school with a more ethnically diverse student body was also beneficial for IP10, as he got along better with his classmates, and the number of people he struggled to connect with decreased significantly.

5.1.3 Relationships with Teachers

The interview partners also shared their experiences with their teachers during their school years, along with their perceptions of how they were treated by them. While it may seem reasonable to assume that teachers would not engage in biased or in some cases even racist behavior, the interviews reveal otherwise.

A recurring topic that emerged frequently was the perception of unfair grading and being graded worse than friends and classmates. IP5 used to have good grades in German but her grades declined after the class was assigned a new German teacher, which lead her to believe that she needed a German tutor. However, the German tutor was confused as to why she was attending tutoring, noting that her German essays were good with little mistakes. A second German tutor also confirmed this opinion. IP5 also mentioned that her friend was puzzled by the low grade she received, given the minimal number of mistakes in her essay.

In many cases, the Black students were not given the same chance to redeem their grades as their white classmates. This was particularly illustrated by IP9 who said,

“You fight for a grade, and you were just as strong as the other student, you were really on the same level as the other student. The other student gets a chance to improve their grade, but you don’t” (Interview, IP9).

He provided more details on the unequal grading:

“There are people who were never there [in class], never paid attention, and yet they get their grades changed. And then there’s you, someone who always paid attention, and they just say, ‘Yeah, that’s not enough anymore. You can’t improve your grade any further’” (Interview, IP9).

In addition to unequal grading, a reoccurring theme such as having one’s work questioned and being met with surprise for writing high-quality papers also emerged. IP5 and IP7 both shared experiences where teachers doubted, they had written their homework or essays themselves, suspecting instead that the work had been copied from the internet or that another person wrote it for them. The reason for this was that their

work was considered too good to be their own, even though their results matched their previous performances (Interview, IP5 & IP7).

Encountering ignorant, prejudice or even racist behavior by teachers is another problem Black students suffer from. During a free study period, IP8's teacher asked students to confess personal habits and seemed puzzled when he didn't raise his hand in response to her question about who in the class smoked cigarettes. She even went a step beyond to ask him if he smokes marijuana in his free time, to which he responded with no (Interview, IP8). Examples of this kind will be discussed in greater depth in the chapter Racism.

IP7 was the only Black person in her school, besides her siblings. She would suffer from racial abuse by both students and teachers. However, there was one teacher who positively impacted her life. The teacher, who was from a small town in Austria, actively intervened at the first sign of student bullying and even publicly confronted her colleagues when they displayed ignorant or racist behavior. She was the only teacher who actively protected IP7 from racism.

"Except for one teacher, whom I want to send an email to and say thank you or express my gratitude, because it's still a mystery to me how she could be so... "based". Especially considering that she grew up in a white village and is a white woman herself" (Interview, IP7).

She then continued to say that that teacher played a big role in her life, which had a positive impact on her.

5.1.3 Early Experiences

Black students often face racism, stereotypes, and discrimination from an early age, with the first encounters beginning in kindergarten and continuing throughout their educational journey until graduation or even university.

IP1 was mocked in first grade by her peers, for the way her hair looked. She typically wore her hair in a ponytail or a bun, but one day she decided to wear her hair down, embracing her natural locks. The white kids standing behind her in the lunch line giggled, and when the interview partner confronted their behavior as to why they were giggling, they

responded by saying “you look like a clown” (Interview, IP1) referring to her hair. IP7 also encountered discriminatory behavior towards her hair but at an even earlier age. The kids in kindergarten would play a game where they would spit in her natural, open hair from the top of the stairwell as she walked downstairs during recess. She explained that racism in her life already started in kindergarten and parents were also perpetrators (Interview, IP7).

IP2 also shared a memory of encountering racism at an early age, recalling an incident from her time in primary school where she was called a *fucking immigrant* and the *N-word*.

IP9 manages to give a generalized opinion on the racist experiences Black children face, “I mean, it starts early... let’s say it actually begins in kindergarten. And it escalates from there. In kindergarten, it starts off as just fun, as if it’s only a joke” (Interview, IP9). However, he shared that his experiences with racism primarily started in primary school and worsened during middle school. Even IP10 recalls that his experiences with racism and bullying started in primary school.

While racism, bullying, and discrimination often begin at an early age and can be perpetrated by anyone, the question remains: How do parents respond in these situations?

5.1.4 Parents

Overall, parents and family play a crucial role in helping children endure or combat racism. However, parents can sometimes be the perpetrators themselves or support those who are.

IP2 mentioned that in her younger years, she would always tell her parents when she was subjected to racism. They would visit the school and speak with the teachers or the parents of the children who targeted her with racist attacks, giving her a feeling of a support system.

IP8’s parents took a different approach to handling the situation. They advised him to ignore his bullies, not to pay attention to their words, and to walk away from the conflict.

While this left him feeling unsupported, his experiences in life helped him understand why his parents chose to act that way at the time.

IP9 is deeply grateful for his family. Despite the challenges he faced at school, he says he could always return home to a family that loved and supported him. His family's support has shaped the way he carries himself and interacts with others today. His father taught him to remain calm at all times and to never resort to physical violence as a reaction. However, in certain situations, his parents would side with the teacher and believe them over their son. He recalls a situation where his father was called to the principal's office over an alleged dispute with a classmate.

"And I thought, okay, maybe he'll support me because I can explain it to him a little... of course not. My father didn't know any better at the time and immediately assumed, "Okay, my son is causing trouble, I need to discipline him." He actually disciplined me in front of the teacher" (Interview, IP9).

He continued by noting that teachers are often unaware of the problems their actions can cause, especially when they do not have the full context of a situation.

Another scenario where parents side with the teachers rather than their children clearly illustrates this dynamic. IP10 informed his parents about teachers being biased towards him but they didn't believe him at first. They thought that his poor grades were a result of him not wanting to put in the effort.

"They only saw the grades that came home, and at the parent-teacher meetings, where I wasn't present – not the individual meetings, but the general ones – they would hear all these negative things from the teachers. And then they'd think, "several teachers are saying this about my son, and my son has bad grades, so why would I believe him?" (Interview, IP10).

It was only after his older sister, who had the same teachers, confirmed that they were also biased against her, and a family friend who was a teacher shared stories of those same teachers showing bias toward certain students, that his parents finally believed him. By that time, he had already finished school, and it was too late to make a difference. Nonetheless, the unwavering support of his parents helped him navigate school life more

easily. Later, at a different school, it gave him the strength to stand up for himself against both teachers and fellow students (Interview, IP10).

IP7 explained that the racism she experienced was perpetuated by the parents in her area, as the children mirrored their parents' behavior. She recalls that during her time in kindergarten the parents of some of the kids would make racist comments towards her and her siblings calling them *N-word darlings* (N-Wort-Püppchen in German) among other things. The parents in her area would also claim that the only reason she and her family lived in their town was because everyone in Africa is starving (Interview, IP7).

An important factor that influenced the interview partners was that their parents never educated them about racism. In the beginning, when she started experiencing racism, she didn't know how to identify it because her mother never discussed racism with her (Interview, IP7). IP9 believes that most immigrant parents who are new to Austria don't know better,

“They assume we somehow already know and can deal with it [racism]. That's the problem. Then a four- or five-year-old is discriminated against because of their skin color, and of course, they don't understand why. The first question they ask is, ‘Why? What did I do wrong?’” (Interview, IP9).

History class is often the first time Black students are introduced to topics such as slavery and colonialism (Interview, IP5, IP7).

In summary, Black students are often times the only ones of their ethnicity in their educational institutions, sometimes they are even the only minority. Being a Black minority often results in experiencing discrimination and racism from a young age, whether it is kindergarten or primary school. It presents numerous challenges, ranging from bullying by classmates to perceived unfair treatment by teachers. To make matters worse, in the most extreme cases, parents can also be perpetrators of racism, just like their children. Many parents fail to educate their children about racism, often leaving them confused and unsure of how to respond when they encounter it. Additionally, when students share experiences of unfair treatment and bias, some parents choose to side with the teacher rather than support their children.

Such instances illustrate deeper issues of racial bias, a topic examined in the next chapter, which presents findings on experiences of racism.

5.2 Them: Racism

This chapter explores findings on racism, supported by specific examples. It examines the various forms of racism exhibited by both students and teachers, including overt and covert expressions. Additionally, it addresses how Africa is portrayed in the classroom, whether through textbooks or the curriculum. Beyond individual interactions, the chapter also takes a broader look at the education system as a whole, offering insights into how Black teachers perceive these dynamics.

5.2.1 The Education System

The Austrian education system has faced criticism for institutional racism (Interview, IP1). Despite growing societal diversity, the issue of racism remains unresolved and may even be worsening (Interview, IP2). IP2 highlights that acquaintances are currently experiencing racism in schools, which she describes as “completely unnecessary” (Interview, IP2). A clear example of how the education system perpetuates racism, is a poster at the WU Vienna (University of Economics). The poster aims to inform students about tutoring opportunities for disadvantaged children, yet it depicts a Black child alongside a white woman. This image promotes the narrative of “white saviorism” (Interview, IP2) which reinforces the harmful stereotype of the helpless Black child in need of white intervention.

“What kind of role model is that? You’re always left thinking, “I’m the disadvantaged child,” especially if you end up identifying with it. But that doesn’t have to be the case. You could approach it the other way around, for example – that would be my suggestion” (Interview, IP2).

The criticism here is that, while the poster may not have been created with ill intentions, there is a need for greater awareness regarding the materials that are published.

The lack of awareness surrounding racism in education is also reflected in the insufficient racism training provided to teaching staff. Many view racism training for teachers as essential (Interview, IP1, IP2, IP5, IP6, IP7, IP8, IP9, IP10), emphasizing the need for educators who are well-informed on the issue and equipped to handle and respond to

racist situations effectively (Interview, IP6). However, there is some debate about the necessity of such training in classrooms with few or no minority students, where teachers may feel less inclined to engage with these issues directly (Interview, IP6). The primary challenge remains that even when teachers are not personally racist or discriminatory, they often lack the awareness to recognize and address racism when it arises (Interview, IP6).

The lack of sensitivity is highlighted by an example shared by IP9: Teachers sometimes show films about Black heritage in class, fully aware that there is a Black student present, and yet fail to consider the potential for that student to become the target of ridicule. When a Black character appears on screen, other students often turn, laugh, and stare at the Black student (Interview, IP9). Another issue arises with the use of the N-word in books, which frequently leads to white classmates eagerly volunteering to read aloud so they can utter the N-word (Interview, IP9). This creates an uncomfortable and problematic situation,

“You can't tell me that it's important for educational purposes. Everyone knows how children react when the N-word comes up. They will all want to say it. They won't even say "N-word"; they'll just say it outright. The teachers will also say it and write it on the board” (Interview, IP9).

This further reveals the shortfall in racism awareness and sensitivity training for teachers.

Another example that underscores the problematic nature of the education system and its materials is an experience at her university shared by IP2. The educational video in the course was about NGOs and Médecins Sans Frontières from the early 2000s, that reproduced *triggering* and *very problematic* images.

“The video included unedited, uncensored images, particularly of Black women who were partially or fully unclothed and visibly in severe pain. There was no indication that consent was sought for filming. This was described as extremely dehumanizing and inappropriate.” (Interview, IP2).

IP8 has expressed concern over how many individuals are treated within the education system, raising the question of whether the recurring issues within the school system are

indicative of a systemic flaw or a “misdesign” (Interview, IP8). If Africa and Black history are going to be taught in the classroom, they should be taught accurately to help students gain a better understanding and appreciation of the continent. Additionally, it is important to have more in-depth discussions about racism and its effects, as this could have a positive impact on society (Interview, IP9).

In this context, the question arises: How are Africa and African societies represented in the curriculum? This issue will be explored in more detail in the next section.

5.2.1.1 Depiction of Africa in the Education System

The portrayal of Africa and African societies in the Austrian education system is considered problematic for several reasons:

1. The disproportionate emphasis on or lack of meaningful discussion about Africa.

The topic of Africa receives minimal attention within the Austrian education system. For some students, Africa is not addressed at all during their school years (IP1, IP10). When it is included, it is often limited to one or two lessons, making it an open-and-shut topic (Interview, IP1, IP2, IP5, IP6, IP7, IP8, IP9, IP10). According to the data, one student even had to request their history teacher to include lessons about Africa, as they felt it was not regarded as an important subject within the curriculum (Interview, IP5). Additionally, African history is covered superficially, focusing primarily on Egypt (IP6, IP10), slavery and colonialism (Interview, IP1, IP2, IP5, IP6, IP7, IP8, IP9, IP10). The broader implications and effects of slavery and colonialism on Africa and world are rarely explored. This lack of depth results in a simplified and shallow portrayal of African history (Interview, IP2, IP6). “Similarly, I felt that slavery was treated in the same way – described so superficially that it was impossible to fully understand what it meant for those who lived through it” (Interview, IP6). Another interviewee added, “the timeline was not presented as it actually was. In fact, I feel it wasn’t addressed at all” (Interview, IP2).

She continues that it is striking that schools fail to address the relatively recent history of colonialism and the recent independence of many African countries, stating, 'I’ve heard things like 200 years ago' (Interview, IP2). Another example of the perceived

marginalization of Africa is evident in the geography game *Guess the Capital*, where the capitals of African countries are seldom, if ever, included.

“Have you ever experienced being asked, ‘what’s the capital of Uganda?’ Or the Congo? Countries like Canada, Peru, Chile, Argentina, Japan, and maybe even Haiti would come up. But Uganda, Sierra Leone, Congo, Angola, Ghana, Cameroon? Africa as a whole? Zero” (Interview, IP9).

2. What is said about the continent

When Africa is included in the curriculum, it is often presented through a whitewashed, Eurocentric lens (Interview, IP1, IP2, IP6, IP8). For example, “that so much was discovered, that they brought so many great raw materials to Europe. But the truly essential part was always left out. It didn’t exist. A real case of whitewashing” (Interview, IP1). Additionally, African countries are frequently labeled as *third-world* nations without addressing the historical reasons behind their exploitation and colonization (Interview, IP1). Crucial aspects, such as the continent’s richness in resources, culture, history, and influential figures, are often overlooked (Interview, IP1, IP8, IP10).

The lack of knowledge among educators about Black history is also evident. For instance, a history teacher dismissed a student’s claim about human zoos in Austria, stating, “he said human zoos didn’t exist. They did not exist in Austria” (Interview, IP5). This denial reflects a broader neglect of African history. Moreover, the impact of Black and African people on society and science is frequently overlooked. According to IP6, much of today’s racism stems from the misconception that Black people have not made significant contributions to society or scientific progress. However, historical evidence demonstrates that many African nations were highly advanced, and vast amounts of their knowledge were appropriated – topics that remain largely unaddressed in the curriculum (Interview, IP6). African history is largely reduced to slavery, and even then, the significance of the slave trade is often minimized. “The teacher tried to convince me that the Holocaust was the worst act of genocide in history. [...] I asked her if she ever heard of the Belgian king [Leopold II]. She said yes. You can clearly tell that people don’t want to talk about it. I don’t know why there is such reluctance to discuss Africa in general” (Interview, IP9).

3. How is Africa depicted and what are *typical* traits for Africa

Expressions like *third world country* are often seen in Austrian school textbooks (Interview, IP1). In addition, the most common idea and depiction of Africa is that it is, poor, uncivilized and dependent on the West and as mentioned earlier, only consists of slavery (Interview, IP1) and of people who are depicted as an inferior and lower race (IP8). In religion class Africa was only a topic in relation to poverty, “we learned about other religions, moral issues, and ethics. Back then they always showed these Black children with sand on their faces, looking emaciated” (Interview, IP10). Africa is characterized as a place of sufferance where the population is starving. IP1 also stated that, despite enduring the ongoing effects of colonialism, African people are still resilient, joyful, and kind-hearted. However, they are unjustly stereotyped by a white perspective as lazy, incapable of working and unintelligent (Interview, IP1). “I never heard anything good about Africa. I only heard about poor people, developing countries, and bad working conditions” (Interview, IP9). The beauty about African culture and its music for example were never mentioned (Interview, IP9).

Other stereotypes that enforce the poverty narrative are the non-functioning of water supply and that Africa is rich in resources, but they don’t know how to use them (Interview, IP2). “Our depiction of Africa was always absolutely [...] as if there was simply nothing there. As if there were nothing, and as if, African people were savages” (Interview, IP6). This narrative leaves her to believe that this representation is not an accident, “of course, it’s white people who wrote these books, that’s already obvious” (Interview, IP6). She continued to say that the portrayal of the continent is simplified and that gives her reason to believe that it is not a coincidence (Interview, IP6) this point of view will be elaborated on in another chapter.

Overall, the depiction of Africa and the way knowledge is presented in Austrian classrooms is largely negative, stereotypical, and demeaning (Interview, IP1, IP2, IP5, IP7, IP8, IP9, IP10). If Africa is shown in a positive light, it is typically in connection with wildlife or safaris (Interview, IP5). The one-sided portrayal of the continent, the absence of critical discussion (Interview, IP1, IP2, IP5, IP7, IP8, IP9, IP10), and the reduction of African history to slavery compelled the interviewees to conduct their own research as they

entered adulthood. Through this, they discovered that African countries are far more than just poverty, slavery and suffering (Interview, IP6, IP8, IP9).

5.2.1.2 Handling of Racism as well as Racist and Degrading Depictions in the Curriculum

The previous sub-chapters examined how Africa, Africans, and Black people are portrayed. The purpose of this sub-chapter is to explore whether and how these degrading and racist portrayals are addressed, as well as to analyze the reactions of classmates and teachers when incidents of racism occur.

There was no effort to address the degrading and one-dimensional portrayals in the learning material by teachers (Interview, IP1, IP2, IP5, IP6, IP7, IP8, IP9, IP10). IP1 explained that, in a classroom with many students from immigrant families, much of the content was either inadequately explained or not presented truthfully. She stated, “There were ideologies held by groups with malicious intentions who viewed other groups – quite bluntly – as nothing more than worthless filth’ (Interview, IP1). Furthermore, she believes that teachers were aware of the inaccuracies in what they taught but chose to ignore them, as it was dictated by the syllabus (Interview, IP1).

Criticism about condescending school and university material is solely voiced by Black students if at all (Interview, IP2). The degrading teachings are accepted by teachers and students, and there are no discussions about it (Interview, IP1, IP5, IP6, IP7, IP8, IP9, IP10). IP8 describes the attitude of his classmates and teachers, “it was more of a ‘well, that’s how it was, and that’s that. It doesn’t really matter now, or it’s over anyway’” (Interview, IP8).

When criticism is voiced by a Black student, teachers tend to by-pass the criticism and switch to another topic, not giving the student the feeling of being respected (Interview, IP2). “I asked my teacher ‘*what are you showing us here?*’ And all he said was ‘*is there any other feedback on the video? You are allowed to say something positive too*’” (Interview, IP2). The response showed the interviewee that there is a lack of reflection and understanding on the part of the teacher. In her opinion, the video should have never been shown in class. Criticism of problematic material, however, can lead to change, as in the year after IP2 voiced her opinion, the video was changed and not shown again.

She was the only one in class that voiced her criticism, receiving no backing from her white classmates. Support and solidarity were only shown after the event. “We are all studying here, we can all think critically, I hope. So why does it always take so long for someone to say something?” (Interview, IP2). She continued to say, “and then afterwards people are like, *‘it’s great that you said something!’* Well, you could have said something too! Why do I have to be the one to say it?” (Interview, IP2). The only critical discussion other classmates and teachers express, in context of slavery, is that slavery is wrong and should not have happened (Interview, IP8).

The lack of solidarity within the class towards Black student is a major issue and Black students are left to fend for themselves (Interview, IP2, IP8). IP2 recalled a time when her university professor made a generalizing and degrading comment about Africa. It was only her and her fellow Black students, who had to intervene and correct the professor.

“In that room, 80% - 90% of the people were white, and it [the criticism] didn’t come from them. That was another moment where I thought to myself, if we weren’t here right now, would everyone have just accepted it, or what?” (Interview, IP2).

She goes on to explain that it was only after the incident that her fellow students congratulated them on WhatsApp, saying that “it is very good and important” that they voiced their criticism (Interview, IP2). There is also a prevailing belief that it is up to marginalized groups to speak out in instances of discrimination, as ‘the other students just sit there and are passive’ (Interview, IP2). Racism is only discussed when the affected group speaks up, and even then, they do so alone, further fostering a sense of isolation (Interview, IP6) – a topic that will be addressed in more detail in a later chapter.

Overall, there is a clear lack of support from both teachers and fellow students when it comes to confronting racist incidents (Interview, IP1, IP2, IP5, IP6, IP7, IP8, IP9, IP10), and often, issues are only addressed or changed when marginalized groups speak out.

5.2.1.3 Covert Racism: Classmates

Covert racism is a particularly challenging topic, as its subtle nature often makes it difficult to recognize and prove when discrimination is occurring.

IP1 stated that even as a child of mixed-race, she became target of racism and reflected on how many things said to her, by both classmates and teachers, were unacceptable, even if they were expressed in a seemingly nice way. An example for that would be that some classmates said that she was *one of the good immigrants* and that she was *not as bad as she looks*. And when the topic of slavery came up in history class, some students would turn to her, anticipating a reaction.

In other cases, Black students are expected to be experts of Africa and are often the center of attention, even though many of them were born and raised in Austria (Interview, IP1, IP2, IP8).

“Or when the topic was about Africa, everyone would immediately say my name. Once we had to memorize the countries of Africa and everyone was like, ‘oh, you must already know them by heart.’ And I thought to myself ‘do you guys know all the countries of Europe by heart? I don’t think so’” (Interview, IP2).

Additionally, whenever the topic of Africa or anything related to Black people came up, the whole class would turn and look at them (Interview, IP1, IP8).

Another example for covert racism is the belief that all Black people look the same. IP2 recalled a time at university where a classmate mistook her for the only other Black woman in their course. She shared that her Black classmate celebrated her birthday, but a fellow student, whom she had worked closely with on several intensive group projects, mistook her for the birthday girl and offered her congratulations instead.

“We look absolutely nothing alike. She’s almost 10 cm taller than me, has a completely different hair texture, a totally different face shape. We’re like night and day. The only thing we have in common is basically our skin color” (Interview, IP2).

On top of that, there is often times a belief that people of the same ethnic group are related. IP7 had another Black student in her school, who was older, and other kids in her class would ask her if he were her brother, which he was not.

The data also reveals that Black students are often stereotyped as always wanting to discuss topics like equality, diversity, or justice. A friend of IP6, whom she met at university, once derisively remarked “diversity – that’s your topic, right?”. She often faces

this and similar remarks, which is particularly striking, as they do not originate from individuals outside of her courses, but rather from those within her circle of friends and acquaintances.

Other forms of covert racism include microaggressions, such as touching someone's hair. IP6 acknowledged that, as the first Black person many children in her area had encountered, she experienced them touching her hair without permission. She also explained why touching someone's hair or asking to touch someone's hair is problematic,

"I only understood the problem later on. On one hand, you're constantly reminded of how exotic you are. 'You are not like us. You are different.' On the other hand, it is also an invasion of personal boundaries" (Interview, IP6)

IP7 also remembers a time when a classmate said *"you have such beautiful hair, can I touch them?"* And then she would put objects in her hair because she thought it was funny. She also explained that many microaggressions by her classmates were said in a very nice way, which often times left her confused. There was a gut feeling of *something about this feels wrong* but at the same time, it was presented in such a nice way that made it harder to pinpoint. Some people also asked her if they can take a picture with her due to her *exotic* hair.

Stereotypes and ignorance are another form of covert racism that were brought up during the interviews. IP8 said that he had to endure *minor stereotypes* and *small, silly comments*. Often times the stereotypes are about the African continent and the Black community (Interview, IP1, IP2, IP5, IP8, IP9, IP10). IP5 explained that her classmates might not be aware of the impact their subtle racist remarks can have on a person. She also believes that most of her classmates don't realize that their remarks and actions are racist.

The assumption of being less intelligent is another form of subtle racism. IP10 acknowledges that he was not the best student in his class, but from the start, his environment made him feel as though he was less intelligent.

Overall, subtle forms of racism are difficult to prove. IP10 claimed “it’s just that it’s in a way that’s hard to prove unless you’ve experienced it yourself” (Interview, IP10). IP9 goes a step further,

“There are people who are subtle about it, and then there are people who are extremely blatant in their subtlety. I don’t even know how to explain indirect behavior, but you can just feel it. And I always say, if it happens 10 times, the eighth time can’t be a coincidence anymore. I mean, once might be a coincidence, but not 3, 4, or 5 times. That’s just not possible” (Interview, IP9).

Covert racism encompasses various subtle actions or remarks that are often only recognized by the victims while going unnoticed or seeming harmless to others. However, these recurring incidents are far from innocuous, as they frequently impact the lives of those targeted, leaving a lasting impression. Their subtlety sometimes makes it challenging to definitely prove them as racist, even though their effects are deeply felt. While this chapter showcased subtle forms of racism that are hard to prove, the next chapter will focus on racism that is overt and can be proven.

5.2.1.4 Overt Racism: Classmates

This sub-chapter highlights the racist comments made to the interviewees by their classmates.

Overt racism manifests in various forms, including remarks about a person's appearance, hair (Interview, IP1, IP2, IP7), body odor (Interview, IP1, IP8), and heritage (Interview, IP1, IP2, IP5, IP6, IP7, IP8, IP9, IP10). In some cases, such comments escalate to physical violence (Interview, IP8, IP9, IP10).

“People in my class used to say, *‘it’s so cool that you don’t smell like the other black people’*” (Interview, IP1), insinuating that the *other Black people*, who smelled like Shea butter, smell bad. “They used to say to me *‘you’re one of the good ones’*” (Interview, IP1), creating a classification between good and bad Black people. IP2 used to get bullied for her hair “they would often make jokes like *‘you have spiders in your hair’* because of my locks and according to them it looks like a spider net” (Interview, IP2). Being bullied or made fun of due to hair is not an uncommon scenario.

As already mentioned, IP7's classmates used to spit in her hair as she walked down the stairs on her way to lunch break, leading to her having to leave the classroom last. She also mentioned that she and her sister used to cry and did not want to go to school, "because we knew that the other kids would behave even more racist if we wore our hair down" (Interview, IP7).

In addition to racist remarks about appearance, one of the most common insults Black students face is the use of the N-word (Interview, IP1, IP2, IP5, IP6, IP7, IP8, IP9, IP10). IP10 recalls an instance when, after completing an exam, a classmate approached him outside the classroom and said, "Nigger" – an unprovoked action. However, he believes that the classmate was encouraged by others and perceived the word as less severe. Similarly, IP7 shares that during elementary school, racism manifested in regular use of the N-word, with classmates calling her the slur even during class hours (Interview, IP7). For IP8, being called the N-word was not an isolated incident; rather, "the N-word was said often" (Interview, IP8).

Racism is not only perpetuated by white individuals. IP5 also experienced racism from people with an ethnic background she specifies "[people] from an Arab and Asian context" (Interview, IP5). It is there that she learned that racism has many different faces and cultural backgrounds. IP2 also mentioned that a racist encounter – where a boy threw rocks at her and simultaneously called her the N-word – was with a student of ethnic descent. It was also there, as a child, that she learned that she is being treated differently due to the color of her skin.

Racism is not only voiced by classmates but also by close friends. IP6 stated that many of her friends would have *thrown her under the bus* if the opportunity presented itself. She remembers a time where the lights went out and her friend wanted to be cool in front of the older students at their school. Her friend's comment was "*I can't see you. I can only see your teeth*" (Interview, IP6), referring to her dark skin not being seen in the dark. She also stated that her friend would usually not make these comments, "but she wanted to seem cool in front of the others. She wanted to make an easy joke for their approval. And it was absolutely worth it to her to throw me under the bus" (Interview, IP6). Racism can also be used as tool by others to gain social acceptance and gain popularity within the social ranks.

Racism can also be influenced through group dynamics, “when they weren't in the group, but rather individually, I got along well with each of them. But when in the group, they would take on the role of racists” (Interview, IP6). She continues to explain, that outside of the group dynamics her classmates behaved “as if racism didn’t exist” (Interview, IP7). Some of her racist classmates, where her neighbors and they got along very well in private. In school however, or in other social settings, “they would start with the racism again” (Interview, IP7).

The alleged knowledge that people have of Africa also plays a role when it comes to racism. IP5 said that she paid attention in class and raised her hand to give the correct answer while a classmate yelled “*shut up *name*, you wouldn’t get an education in your country anyway. What knowledge can you really provide here?*” (Interview, IP5). She received more harassment around Christmas time when she volunteered to bake cookies for the class, “**name* don’t do it! You don’t even know how to wash your hands. They don’t teach you that in your country!*” (Interview, IP5). She continued by saying that her classmates used to call her Ebola (Interview, IP5).

There is a tendency that racism is disguised as jokes and other “stupid comments” (Interview, IP6, IP8). Things like “people in Africa are black because they don’t shower” (Interview, IP8), “people in Africa live in huts that are made out of shit” (Interview, IP8), “Black people don’t have water” (Interview, IP9), “Black people only play the Bongos” (Interview, IP9), and natural Black hair is compared to a dust mop (Interview, IP7). Racist comments are not only spread in school but also on social media. IP8 recounts a time when an anonymous person – he now knows who the person was – sent him racist messages and used to harass him (Interview, IP8). IP7, who had a similar experience, said that a classmate left a *joke* on her Facebook page that said “what is the difference between a Black person (she believes the N-word was used) and a bucket full of shit? The bucket” (Interview, IP7). In addition, the people in her class said that the only reason she and her family are in Austria, is “because people in Africa are starving” (Interview, IP7).

Being compared to monkeys are also degrading comments Black students have to suffer from (Interview, IP7, IP8). IP8 was a very athletic child and could climb very well, leading his classmates to say “he can only climb that well because he’s black. Look at this

monkey” (Interview, IP8). IP7 also used to have to listen to her classmates making monkey noises towards her.

Another way of alienating Black people is by not seeing them as Austrian. “They [classmates] said, *‘you might be born here, but you have a different skin color than us! You cannot be an Austrian’*” (Interview, IP9). While the non-Black children made racist remarks, they also changed a popular children’s game *Who is afraid of the Black man* into *Who is afraid of the N-word* (Interview, IP7), further putting a distance between *them* and the Black students.

Other forms of separation are IP9’s example when he went on a school trip, also known as orientation week, where students get to know one another. He revealed that he was the only Black child in the Bus and “they are laughing about it and making jokes and remarks like *‘Why are you here? Why is your family even here?’*” (Interview, IP9). Additionally, to making jokes and remarks, nobody wanted to get to know him,

“outside the youth hostel, there’s an area where everyone eats and where they barbecue. Everyone is laughing, everyone is sitting together, and I’m just sitting there alone because no one wants to be around me or share a room with me” (Interview, IP9).

After an incident of racism occurs, there is an expectation by the provokers that the targeted person reacts in an aggressive way (Interview, IP9, IP10). “They were really waiting for me to make a mistake and slip up” (Interview, IP9). IP10’s experience compliment that “[after a racist incident] everyone was waiting for my reaction, they were waiting for me to punch him in the face” (Interview, IP10).

Racism exhibited by students can often be covert, but in many instances, it is overt and direct. The following sub-chapter will explore the covert and overt racism displayed by teachers.

5.2.1.5 Covert Racism: Teachers

Similar to the previous sub-chapters, which explored both subtle and explicit forms of racism among students, this section examines the direct and overt discriminatory behaviors exhibited by teachers toward Black students.

Inappropriate expectations through teachers are a sign of covert racism. There is an expectation that Black children are experts, when Africa is discussed in the curriculum. IP1 explained that her teacher adopted an African child “and then she wanted to know a lot from me, and I thought to myself ‘*shouldn’t you be the one teaching me?*’ She kept making comments like ‘*What’s your opinion on this topic?*’ And I was just like ‘*What do you want me to say?*’” (Interview, IP1). She wanted to see her student as an expert of African topics, however her student admits that she probably knew just as much about Africa as her teacher, since she was a young child (Interview, IP1).

There is also a common preconception that every Black student has experienced racism and is willing to share their experiences. IP5 recalls a time during her university course when a professor asked the class if anyone had encountered racism while crossing a state border. When no one raised their hand, the professor directed her attention to IP5 and asked, “Would you like to share your experiences with discrimination at borders?” (Interview, IP5), compelling her to explain that she had not raised her hand and had nothing to contribute.

Another characteristic of covert racism is voicing of insensitive and ignorant comments. IP7’s sports teacher used to say, “the only reason you are such a fast runner is because you are Black and Black people have a different anatomy” (Interview, IP7). Another teacher would also compare her natural hair to a mop in a joking manner. “He always acted in a collegial manner but then he would have the most extreme takes” (Interview, IP7), for instance he would say that “there is no racism in Austria, and Mexicans are the new N-words of today” (Interview, IP7).

IP8 described his teacher as “weird and racist” (Interview, IP8). He explained his statement, “You really shouldn’t say this at all, but I’ll say it anyway: he didn’t actually mean it in a bad way, but he was racist” (Interview, IP8). The interviewee was asked by the teacher to get something for him “and I asked him ‘*do I have to get it because of XYZ reason?*’ and he said ‘*no, because you’re Black*’” (Interview, IP8). He later continues to say that while the teacher’s actions were not appropriate, he was not graded worse than his other classmates, he was not treated worse than his other classmates and he was not mean to him.

IP9's teacher used the term *zernegert* (German) as another word for *to destroy*. The literal meaning of the word means *niggered* and doesn't have an actual meaning. The interview partner stated that his teacher was not spiteful, however very *old-fashioned*.

IP2's teacher described their first encounter with a Black person as if they had encountered an alien. IP2 criticized this remark as highly problematic, especially in a classroom full of children, because it implied that making such statements was acceptable. She further emphasized the role of teachers as role models, noting that their language and behavior can have a significant impact on students' attitudes and development.

Gaslighting is another form of subtle discrimination mentioned in the interviews. IP9 talked about a teacher that tried to tell him that she is more knowledgeable about racism than him. The topic in the classroom was racism and equal treatment to which the student said, "racism shouldn't exist, but people experience it and fight against it" (Interview, IP9). When discussing this, the teacher responded that increasing awareness and education would lead to a better understanding of racism. In response the interview partner emphasized that lived experiences provide a deeper understanding, highlighting the difference in perspectives between Black and white individuals. The teacher's response to IP8's statement was, "Mister Mustermann, just because you're Black doesn't mean you understand racism better than I do as a history teacher. [...] you haven't spent 20- or 30-years teaching history" (Interview, IP8), insinuating that theoretical knowledge about racism is on the same level as living through the experience.

Another situation that includes subtle racism through teachers, is thinking that all Black people look the same. IP2's university professor confuses her and the other Black student in the course. "Situations like that come up sometimes, and I just think it's a bit unnecessary. This doesn't happen with all the blonde people. Plus, we really don't look alike at all" (Interview, IP2).

The severeness with how teachers react to certain situations and with certain students is also an aspect that describes covert racism. IP10 was caught copying homework of one of his classmates by a teacher. According to him what usually happens is, the teacher takes away the notebook and informs the parents. However, one day he and three of his

friends were caught copying homework of another student. “I was the only one whose parents were informed that I had copied in school. My father had to come to school, and it was made into a really big deal” (Interview, IP10). The disciplinary actions taken against him, compared to his white classmates, were disproportionately harsher. A minor infraction on his part was treated as a much more serious offense than when committed by his peers (Interview, IP10).

IP8 recalls an incident where a teacher attempted to have him expelled after two classmates got into an argument. “It was a bit louder, a bit more heated, and some words were said that didn’t necessarily need to be, but it wasn’t to the point where you’d think fists were about to fly” (Interview, IP8). While he was trying to de-escalate the situation, a teacher singled him out, insisting he report to the principal and face disciplinary action for his so-called unacceptable behavior. Neither the principal nor the student himself understood why he was being punished, especially since he wasn’t even involved in the argument.

IP6’s experience with differential treatment and punishment was when she was in the beginning stage of her teenage years and her teacher humiliated her in front of the entire class. She doesn’t recall whether she was talking to her classmate during the lesson, but the teacher threw his keychain at her and started yelling. He kept walking closer to her “with his mouth literally foaming at the corners [...] but I don’t remember what he said” (Interview, IP6). She also never saw him react that way toward any other student.

“Of course, one could argue that he was just having a bad day, but that wasn’t the case. I can only go by my gut feeling, but even if he had been having a bad day – people often take out their frustration on easy targets – it wasn’t just that. It was obvious that he genuinely felt I didn’t belong there, that I should be in a lower-tier school, and that I was worth less than the other students” (Interview, IP6).

IP10 sums up covert racism through teachers as “it came more from the teachers because, due to their profession, they have to be more subtle. But they have to be, otherwise it would cause big problems for them” (Interview, IP10). However, “teachers have other possibilities and tools to be subtle, be it through grades or what they tell your parents on parents – teacher night” (Interview, IP10).

An example of teachers withholding information from parents is provided by IP10, who attended a parent-teacher meeting with his father. The teacher claimed that the student had only completed one or two assignments. However, as they reviewed the list of missing assignments, IP10 presented his folder, which contained all the homework marked on the list as incomplete – each of them had been signed by the teacher. This discrepancy left his father suspicious of the teacher's behavior.

While this sub-chapter examined the subtle ways teachers may express disdain towards certain students and demonstrate covert racism, the next sub-chapter highlights more overt instances of teachers displaying racism directly.

5.2.1.6 Overt Racism: Teachers

Although less common, there are instances where teachers exhibit overt racism towards their students.

IP1's teacher made a remark about the African continent, stating that "the *country* would be nothing without European help or the West for that matter" (Interview, IP1). The teacher also told the interviewee, "You should be grateful because at least you don't have to starve like the children in Africa" (Interview, IP1). Similarly, a carer dismissed a student's complaint about being called the N-word by responding, "Well, that's what you are. You are an N-word" (Interview, IP5). She also recalled a time when a teacher only replied in English, even though she spoke to her in German.

Although the interview partner acknowledges that the term was used in a historical context, she and her fellow Black students found it deeply triggering that their professor repeatedly used the N-word during the lecture (Interview, IP2).

Racism is sometimes only revealed when the targeted minority group is absent from the classroom. IP2 disclosed that her teacher made problematic statements about Black people when she was not present, yet his demeanor shifted when she was in the room (Interview, IP2).

Humiliation and the reinforcement of racist behavior are also indicators of overt racism. IP7 shared an incident where, due to her poor eyesight, her teacher moved her desk all the way to the front of the classroom, directly in front of the blackboard, in a way that felt demeaning rather than accommodating.

“She knew that the other students were already behaving in a very racist manner, she showed no consideration for the situation. It was these kinds of actions where she displayed a complete lack of awareness and sensitivity” (Interview, IP7).

IP8 experienced a deeply humiliating and racist incident when the classroom had a musty smell, and the teacher singled him out as the cause. She pulled him out of class and claimed that other students had said he was the one responsible for the odor – an accusation that made no sense, as he consistently showered after gym class. Eventually, it was discovered that the source of the smell was the classroom curtains, not the student. Despite this, he never received an apology from the teacher (Interview, IP8).

Although teachers are expected to be impartial authority figures, racism continues to persist among some of them. The following sub-chapter will examine the normalization of racism within the educational environment.

5.2.1.7 Normalization of Racism

The language used in the interviews reveals that racism is normalized by both teachers and students and is not perceived as a significant issue.

For instance, IP7 recalled, “he [the teacher] was the kind of person who would always jokingly refer to my hair as a mop” (Interview, IP7). When she expressed discomfort, the teacher dismissed her concerns, insisting it was just a joke. Her classmates also contributed to the normalization of racism as “in class and during lessons they would always call me the N-word and other slurs and make racist jokes” (Interview, IP7). Similarly, IP8 described how the “N-word was said often” in his educational environment (Interview, IP8). He stated that he regularly experienced racism and that at his school “it was not a good place to be a PoC. At some point it became somewhat normalized because everything was already said” (Interview, IP8).

Being *well-integrated* can sometimes lead students to believe they can let their guard down and express racist views without consequence. IP7’s experience displays that as her friend at the time and classmate made racist rant about the N-words in Austria and that it is scary that so many of them are here and also questioning why they have to live here – in front of her. The classmate then told the interview partner that she is still half white and that she is not one of them. “They also said something as if I were an exception

and she doesn't even see me as one of them [...] because I fit in and speak like them" (Interview, IP7). Similarly, IP8 described how his classmates downplayed their racist behavior, saying, "we don't mean it like that, you are our house nigger" (Interview, IP8). There is also a notable lack of understanding regarding the severity of racial slurs, as one of IP10's classmates claimed that "the N-word is not even a bad word" (Interview, IP10).

IP8's teacher who accused him of having a bad odor – it turned out that the curtains needed to be washed – also didn't apologize to him and saw her statement as non-problematic, "her reaction was *oh ok*. It didn't matter anymore, and it was no longer an issue" (Interview, IP8). Whether or not her behavior had a negative effect on the student was not considered.

Other examples of classmates normalizing racism, and not understanding the severity include IP9's classmate who told him "You act as if you've been through hell just because you're Black. I mean, you didn't die, and people just said words, it's not that bad" (Interview, IP9). At the same time this classmate, who did not see racism as a deep issue, did not want to go to school because a boy in their class did not like her. This illustrates the extent to which racism is not taken seriously in the average school environment.

When racism is reported to a teacher, often the claims are played down. IP9's teacher told him "It can happen. They probably don't mean it like that" (Interview, IP9). Other statements made by teachers include "you guys are young, this is normal. They will grow out of it. It's just the way young kids talk these days" (Interview, IP7).

In summary, racist statements and actions are not seen as a problem and played down or seen as a joke by both teachers and students, "it was never discussed in more detail, even though it was mentioned to the class teacher, it was somehow never brought up more seriously" (Interview, IP10).

5.2.2 Teaching Them – Teachers, Organizations

This section of the paper provides an overview of teachers' perspectives on racism within the education system. It will explore institutional barriers, racist interactions with colleagues, racial dynamics among students, and the overall impact these experiences have on the interviewees. Additionally, the section will examine the strategies teachers employ to address racism and discuss potential actions and demands for change.

5.2.2.1 Social Setting

The interviews show that being the only Black person is a phenomenon which occurs among teachers (Interview, IP1T, IP2T). IP2T went into further detail on their experiences. For a while they were not the only POC teacher, which in their eyes was helpful as “you can always talk to them and they can clarify certain things, since they are coming from a similar standpoint” (Interview, IP2T), in situations that may seem odd. Being the only one has made life at school a bit more difficult, as they explained that “there is a certain ease of communication” (Interview, IP2T) when there is another Black teacher at the workplace present and there is a functioning relationship. Overall, they do not have problems with their white colleagues.

In addition, IP2T also has the feeling that the students at their school accept them, “I take the job seriously [...] and the students see the passion that I put in and the respect that I demand and the respect that I give” (Interview, IP2T). There are very few incidences where they and a student did not get along.

As a Black teacher they are the contact person for when incidents of racism occur. They acknowledge that not all incidents of racism are reported to them, but when approached with an issue, they try to offer advice based on their own experience. In some cases, their advice led to a lesson being taught.

5.2.2.2 Institutional Obstacles

The teachers have highlighted numerous issues within the education system when it comes to racism and the resistance when trying to combat racism.

IP1T believes that the system operates on outdated thought patterns, which she strives to challenge and reshape. She criticizes the curriculum for failing to address current needs, arguing that many of its topics are no longer relevant. To her, the education system feels stagnant and *stuck in the past*, as if it has not evolved since the 1980s, rather than adapting to the ever-changing demands of society (Interview, IP1T).

Other aspects mentioned are that there is no understanding that racism exists, and that racism is a problem (Interview, IP1T, IP2T). According to IP1T, the City of Vienna (Stadt Wien), her employer, does not have an anti-discrimination or anti-racism concept. While

diversity, inclusion, and ethnicity are often mentioned in job postings, there is no concrete, integrated approach to addressing these issues in practice. She mentioned,

“I worked hard for a year to ensure that both our team and the children could have an anti-racism workshop. However, my colleagues were not enthusiastic about it at first, nor was my management. Their reasoning was: they didn’t want to create a problem where there supposedly wasn’t one” (Interview, IP1T).

Despite working with children from diverse backgrounds, the administration and staff do not see racism or discrimination as an issue worth addressing.

IP2T talked about their awareness of racial incidents in schools and the challenges in addressing them. They explained that comments about skin color, hair, or other physical features are common, but often, Black students simply absorb these experiences without confrontation, moving on quickly.

However, when students do report such incidents to teachers, the response from school administration tends to be inadequate. They point out the lack of structured responses, such as workshops or expert-led discussions, to properly address racism. They shared a personal experience where they attempted to bring in an outside expert (Interview, IP2T).

Despite their efforts, they found the administration's understanding of racism to be inadequate, making meaningful change seem unlikely. While there was initial progress in organizing a workshop, financial constraints and the onset of COVID-19 ultimately shut down the initiative (Interview, IP2T).

Other excuses that complicate the implementation of anti-racism workshops are, “it is also a question of costs, and you can’t expect parents to bear the burden and with inflation, prices have risen so much” (Interview, IP1T).

Another problem that IP1T mentions is that leadership positions are still predominantly held by white, privileged individuals, which she sees as the root of deeper issues, “because they don’t have this experience, yet they are the ones allowed to create a diversity concept” (Interview, IP1T). IP1T acknowledges her own bias but argues that, at the very least, experts with relevant experience should be consulted to provide a different perspective or an honest assessment of the situation.

Despite having the same working experience as her white colleagues, she has to work harder to gain the same recognition. Factors such as appearance, accent and other characteristics result in her colleagues holding more power of credibility, even when they express the same opinion. An example provided is how parents for instance often disregard her professional input and seek confirmation from a white colleague. When the white colleague provides the same answer, it is suddenly accepted, which reinforces that her authority is not perceived as equal. She links this issue to a broader systemic failure, pointing out the lack of mandatory diversity training and the absence of such topics in professional education. She argues that these gaps contribute to ongoing discrimination and make it even more challenging to address these deeply ingrained biases.

The lack of interest in combating racism is also prevalent at IP2T's workplace. The only time racism is a topic in class, is in the context of national socialism and anti-Jewish racism. They are also of the opinion that there is a lack of engagement with racism in Austria and that critical thinking and media awareness are necessary (Interview, IP2T).

They further elaborate the problems within the Austrian education system and its curriculum and the way Africa and Blackness are often represented in educational material. They highlight a pattern where Africa is primarily associated with negative topics such as poverty, HIV, dictatorships, unstable governments and genocide. In contrast, when discussing Europe, the focus is often broader and contains more positive aspects. This repeated framing reinforces a one-dimensional, negative perception of Africa. They argue that this selective representation is problematic because it shapes how students perceive Africa and Blackness, associating them primarily with suffering and instability. To counteract this, they advocate for a more well-rounded and normalized inclusion of Black voices and African contributions across all subjects (Interview, IP2T).

They also alluded to Africa being depicted as an opposite to Europe in school textbooks. "Europe is seen as enlightened, rich cultured and stable to an extent. Africa is generally presented as the opposite" (Interview, IP2T).

Another problem when teaching about Africa is "teachers aren't required really to learn hardly anything about Africa" (Interview, IP2T), which makes it unrealistic to expect them to prioritize it in their teaching. Furthermore, history education in general is often shallow,

even for European history. Many teachers only have a basic understanding of their own national history, let alone African history. When it comes to African history, access to records is more difficult, and learning it requires both time and a personal commitment, something many teachers do not have the incentive to undertake since they are not required to teach it and are paid the same regardless (Interview, IP2T).

They also provide a specific example of how Egypt is often skipped in later years of history education, despite its foundational role in early civilizations. It's puzzling that some teachers choose to bypass Egypt altogether while covering Greek and Roman history in detail. This omission reflects a broader pattern of de-emphasizing Africa in historical narratives, reinforcing a Eurocentric perspective in education (Interview, IP2T).

There is a belief that the negative depiction of Africa has a negative effect on Black students and that education plays a role in shaping students' self-esteem and identity (IP2T). White Austrian students benefit from a curriculum that reinforces their cultural significance, even if they do not consciously recognize it. The vast knowledge they gain about European and American history, literature, and art gives them a sense of belonging and importance in the world (Interview, IP2T).

In contrast, Black students are largely absent from the curriculum. Over the course of their education, they rarely, if ever, encounter Black authors, filmmakers, or historical figures beyond a limited scope. This lack of representation makes them feel like a "non-entity" in the educational space, reinforcing their marginalization (Interview, IP2T).

Black students are also often heavily outnumbered, with few, if any, Black teachers. They are learning from the same Eurocentric materials as their white peers, but for them, this material implicitly suggests that Black people have played little role in shaping history, literature, or intellectual thought. This absence has real consequences, as students who do not see themselves reflected in their education may struggle with self-esteem and a sense of identity (Interview, IP2T).

IP2T uses the metaphor of appetite and food to explain how students often do not recognize the absence of Black history, culture and contributions in their education until they are exposed to them. They compare this to hunger: sometimes people don't realize they are hungry until someone offers them food. Similarly, students, particularly Black

students, may go through their education without actively noticing the lack of Black representation because they have never been given the opportunity to engage with it. However, once they are introduced to Black historical figures, cultural traditions, philosophies, and perspectives, they begin to realize what they were missing (Interview, IP2T).

The food in their analogy represents knowledge and representation. As students consume more of it, their appetite grows, and they recognize the value and richness of what they had been deprived of. However, many students never reach this realization because they are so accustomed to the absence of Black narratives that they don't even question it (Interview, IP2T).

IP2T also explained that national identity and historical narratives shape societal perceptions of different racial and ethnic groups, particularly in Europe. According to them, national pride is built around historical achievements, in many European countries. As an example, Greeks take pride in their ancient civilization, Italians in the Roman Empire, the French in Napoleon and the Austrians in the Habsburg dynasty. These historical legacies provide a sense of identity and cultural importance for white Europeans (Interview, IP2T).

In contrast, Black people in these societies do not have the same kind of historical representation. Their contributions and histories are often ignored or overshadowed by negative stereotypes. Because of this, society does not associate Blackness with greatness or historical significance in the same way it does with white Europeans (Interview, IP2T).

This lack of historical representation has real-world consequences, particularly in areas like immigration, housing, and social acceptance. They also argue that because many Europeans have only been exposed to negative images of Black people i.e. poverty, crime, disease, they may subconsciously (or consciously) discriminate against Black individuals. For example, a landlord deciding who to rent an apartment to may feel more comfortable choosing a white tenant because they associate whiteness with cultural legitimacy and Blackness with risk (Interview, IP2T).

The challenge within the education system is that teachers simply follow the textbook without questioning its content. They are often too busy to critically reflect on what they are teaching and may not have the knowledge to recognize biases. There may not be intentional malice, teachers are doing their jobs without much thought about the deeper implications of the material (Interview, IP2T).

However, at higher levels, such as those responsible for approving and publishing educational materials, there is a greater responsibility. Since these individuals shape what students learn, they should be more aware of the impact of biased or incomplete representations. If they lack knowledge, they should actively seek input from relevant communities, such as African organizations, to ensure the material is accurate and respectful (Interview, IP2T).

They also point out that there are review boards for history textbooks, where different groups have the opportunity to critique and influence content before it is published. However, the African community often has to fight for a seat at the table, *elbowing* their way in to ensure their perspectives are considered. They also draw a parallel to feminism, explaining that just as many men may not initially recognize gender biases in history or language, people who are not part of marginalized communities often fail to see racial biases in educational materials. The solution is to *switch lenses*, to intentionally look at the world from different perspectives, so that more voices can be included in shaping the narratives that students learn (Interview, IP2T).

IP1T shared similar views, highlighting a lack of cultural awareness when it comes to identity. She highlights the challenges that Black children face in a predominantly White educational system that does not actively acknowledge or support their cultural identities (Interview, IP1T).

She explains that all children, but especially Black children, grow up under rules that are shaped by a White-dominant society. They are expected to conform to these norms, but there is little to no space for them to explore their own identities. Teachers do not take the initiative to engage with students' cultural backgrounds, which could help prevent identity struggles and allow children to feel fully seen and valued (Interview, IP1T).

She also acknowledges that many teachers aim to treat all students equally and avoid making distinctions based on cultural differences. While this intention is positive, since all children should be treated fairly, it becomes problematic when teachers completely disregard cultural backgrounds. The issue is not just about treating students the same but about recognizing and valuing their full identities (Interview, IP1T).

5.2.2.3 *Racism among Students*

Because they are Black teachers, they are more attuned to noticing instances of racism between students and have also given examples on the matter.

IP1T noticed children excluding a Black child “because the argument of the child was ‘you are too Black to play with us’” (Interview, IP1T). She also touched on that racism Black children experience today, is the same racism she experienced back when she was in school, “it’s always the same topics, skin color, hair, smell, or something like that” (Interview, IP1T).

She also highlighted that racism, and discriminatory thinking starts at a young age, often rooted in what children learn at home. She mentioned that even very young children, including those from migrant backgrounds, already exhibit internalized racist behaviors (Interview, IP1T).

She shared an example from her experience working with children: while traveling on a train to a water park, a group of six-year-olds, despite having frequent discussions about diversity and inclusion, still openly insulted two Black teenagers by calling them *black kaka people* after seeing them watching something on a phone. She noted that this kind of behavior starts even earlier, as young as three years old, when children instinctively use the term *kaka* (a derogatory word meaning poop) as an insult specifically towards Black children, while not necessarily doing the same to others (Interview, IP1T).

She argued that this early differentiation, is deeply troubling, especially because the education system and politics show little interest in addressing or changing these ingrained biases. Despite how early these attitudes take root, there is still a lack of meaningful intervention or structural change (Interview, IP1T).

IP2T noted that especially after the murder of George Floyd, students became more aware of the dangers of racism and that the students mostly get along. However, their

observations on racism at school mostly refer to music and the usage of the N-word. A specific example mentioned is the debate on who is *allowed* to use the N-word. Some students give their non-Black friends a *pass* to use the word, which can be problematic.

5.2.2.4 Racism among Colleagues

While Black teachers often notice racism among students, it is equally important to examine the racism present among their colleagues.

IP1T has not personally experienced racism from her colleagues, at least not in an overt way, perhaps only in subtle or indirect ways. However, she acknowledges that racism among colleagues might still exist, stating “I only know that my colleague, who recently joined us – she is from Ethiopia – has personally experienced racism from her colleagues at other kindergartens” (Interview, IP1T).

Racist behavior IP1T has noticed are mostly racist remarks, for example “I have often heard colleagues say that Black children somehow smell different. Or, that a child's behavior is due to their country of origin, implying that the parents are to blame” (Interview, IP1T).

She also described how some parents, particularly those from lower socioeconomic backgrounds i.e. working class or lower middle class, are in *survival mode* and that their primary focus is ensuring basic needs rather than being able to actively engage in their children's well-being. Because of this, they might struggle with responsibilities like punctuality or keeping appointments. She also observes that frustration among colleagues is often projected onto the children. For example, when parents are late for pick-up or unreliable, teachers might take out their irritation on the child. “And then I would hear statements from my colleagues, like during the late shift ‘I'm sitting here because of you, while your parents are probably at home chilling and don't even have to work’” (Interview, IP1T).

As mentioned previously, IP2T commented on that fact that teachers do not address racist depictions or racism in the curriculum. IP2T takes a different approach, where they make a conscious effort to integrate certain important issues i.e. race, identity, or social justice into their teaching. They emphasize that these topics still have a significant impact on real-world experiences, which is why they choose to discuss them. On the

other hand, some teachers do not prioritize these subjects, possibly because they do not personally find them relevant or important and it does not reflect their reality (Interview, IP2T).

IP2T also mentioned that a teacher used the N-Word in a distasteful and trivializing way during a lesson. They recall discussing the matter with the students, advising them on how to approach and confront the issue, and even dedicating a lesson to strategies for standing their ground. IP2T encouraged the students to push back and see how the situation developed, believing it was a valuable learning opportunity for them to challenge authority and stand up for what they believed in (Interview, IP2T).

5.2.2.5 Emotional Stress

Having to witness racism among students or performed by colleagues also has an effect on Black teachers.

Frustration is common, whether it stems from the dismissal of racism's significance (Interview, IP1T) or from students casually using the N-word (Interview, IP2T) without considering the emotional distress it may cause to Black teachers and students.

IP1T also expressed a deep sense of anger and disappointment. Despite it being 2024, society is still debating the same issues of racism and discrimination that have been discussed for decades. She reflected on how these issues were already present in her own childhood, and it frustrates her that progress is so slow. She feels that those in positions of power have the ability to implement change much faster than those who are actively working within institutions, yet meaningful change is not happening at the pace it should (Interview, IP1T).

5.2.2.6 Active Strategies

Teachers have also shared examples of how they respond to instances of racism, whether it comes from a colleague or occurs among students.

IP1T explains how she handles racism depending on whether it comes from children or colleagues. When a child exhibits racist behavior, she believes it is important to address the issue directly with the child, guiding them to understand why their actions are harmful. However, when racism comes from a colleague, she takes a more direct

approach by pulling them aside and confronting them about their behavior. IP1T emphasizes that such actions can be deeply damaging to children (Interview, IP1T).

Despite this, she notes that instances of racism from colleagues rarely occur in her presence. The believe is because she has firmly established her stance on the issue and consistently voices her opinions. As a result, colleagues are more hesitant to act inappropriately around her (Interview, IP1T).

In addition, IP1T expressed a heightened sense of empathy and care when working with Black children. She acknowledges that many Black children come from households where trauma is present, often passed down from their parents. She references a common pattern in many Black families, where – according to her – emotional violence plays a role in upbringing. Because of this understanding, she makes a conscious effort to be even more gentle, patient, and affectionate with Black children (Interview, IP1T).

While she wouldn't necessarily say she is more *cautious*, she does describe herself as being more sensitive to the children's needs. This sensitivity translates into an especially warm and nurturing approach when interacting with them, ensuring they feel safe and supported (Interview, IP1T).

IP1T also emphasizes the importance of educational discussions to bring awareness to the issue, when a child makes a racist remark. However, there is an understanding that real change requires cooperation with parents. This can be difficult, as many parents, especially those from migrant backgrounds, may not have the emotional or mental energy to confront or break down their own internalized racism. As a result, these biases are often unconsciously passed on to their children. IP1T notes that children are a reflection of their home environment and society:

“In the end, it is not really the child who would make such a statement on their own. It usually comes from their home environment or surroundings. A child, by themselves, would never make such a remark if they hadn’t heard it somewhere else” (Interview, IP1T).

IP2T sees racism as “a specialty of mine” (Interview, IP2T). A strategy used to combat racism is to teach about Black history and read books by Black authors but also give a

space of where critical discussions can be had. They mention that some teachers are not open to have critical conversations because “a lot of teachers don't like critical conversations” (Interview, IP2T), they prefer to stick to their lesson plans and avoid being derailed by student discussions. Covering the material within a set time frame rather than fostering meaningful dialogue is the priority of many teachers (Interview, IP2T).

IP2T however, takes a different approach. As mentioned, critical thinking and discussion are their essentials to learning. To achieve this, they create a safe space where students feel encouraged to express their opinions, ask questions and engage in debates. They stress the importance of consistency in fostering this environment, ensuring that students' voices are heard rather than dismissed due to time constraints. For the speaker, the core of education is an exchange of ideas and critical thinking, rather than just rushing through material to meet a schedule (Interview, IP2T).

5.2.2.7 Possibilities for Improvements

While the interview partners highlighted numerous flaws and challenges within the Austrian education system, they also provided suggestions for addressing and improving them.

According to IP1T there is a need for a fundamental change in the educational system to make it more inclusive and relevant to modern times. Some efforts have been made to address these issues; however, these efforts are insufficient, and real progress requires mandatory anti-discrimination training for educators to break down internalized biases and outdated mindsets (Interview, IP1T).

She suggests that once these deep-seated prejudices are addressed, educators will be more receptive to new ideas and improvements in educational concepts. Another important aspect is involving Black educators in the process to bring in diverse perspectives and expertise. Nevertheless, without tackling the root causes of discrimination and outdated thinking, any new initiatives will be ineffective as, “it's like piling garbage on top of garbage, but the original garbage hasn't been removed” (Interview, IP1T).

IP1T also spoke of a powerful and emotional experience related to representation and the impact it has on Black parents and children. She explained, when Black parents visit the

kindergarten, they often arrive with many concerns, wondering whether their child will be safe, understood, and fully seen in the environment. At first, these parents see only white staff members. However, when they finally notice IP1T, a Black teacher, their expressions change “they make big eyes, breathe a deep sigh of relief, and smile at me” (Interview, IP1T). She continued, “and I have experienced this with all the Black parents I have met so far. They were always totally excited that I was there” (Interview, IP1T). This reaction of visible comfort and reassurance deeply moves the interviewee and highlights the importance of representation, especially from an early age.

IP1T also shared a specific story about a Black mother expressing gratitude. The mother was thrilled that her daughter had a teacher who looked like her, someone she could look up to. The daughter even started asking her mom to recreate the teacher’s hairstyles at home, something that strengthened their bond and made their daily hair routine easier.

IP2T further elaborated on the importance of mandatory anti-racism training, which is to train teachers on how to recognize and address racism in educational settings. Teachers need to first understand what racism is in order to prevent problematic situations from occurring. This includes thinking “critically about the media that they’re using and the language that they’re using” (Interview, IP2T). He also mentioned that Austrians often engage in discussions about religion, nationality and class but they are significantly behind in addressing racism (Interview, IP2T).

Students are in the center of racism in the Austrian education system, teachers are subsidiaries of the abuse, while organizations act as a third party and offer a detailed insight into the situation at large.

5.2.3 Black Anti-Racism Organizations

This section of the paper provides a brief overview of racism within the Austrian education system, from the perspective of Black anti-racism organizations D!SRUPT and AEWTASS.

5.2.3.1 Goals

Correcting misrepresentation and Black empowerment are important themes for Black anti-racist organizations (Interview, AEWTASS, D!SRUPT).

A speaker for AEWTASS emphasized the importance of changing how Africa is depicted in Austria and especially in the educational settings and demonstrates the positive impact Black anti-racism organizations can have on students. They also appreciate that the organization, AEWTASS, is intentionally Black-centered, meaning that whenever possible, the founder prioritizes hiring Black individuals for roles within the organization. This is seen as crucial because it ensures that Black people are actively creating educational material and leading the work, rather than being sidelined or tokenized,

“because there are many organizations that proclaim that they're working on the behalf of black people and then the board is all white, the leader there is all white, and most of the positions are filled by white people and Black people are fractioned, afraid to speak, afraid to be their full selves” (Interview, AEWTASS).

In contrast, AEWTASS ensures that Black people are at the forefront, making decisions and driving change. While this approach is not always easy, it is ultimately fulfilling and necessary for true representation and empowerment (Interview, AEWTASS).

D!SRUPT made it their goal and main focus on educating and training individuals who work in the field of education. Their approach focuses on three aspects: 1. defining racism – helping individuals understand what racism is, 2. recognizing its harm – explaining why racism is hurtful and how it affects people on an emotional and societal level, 3. Self-reflection – encouraging individuals to critically examine their own actions and behaviors to understand how they might contribute to racism, even unintentionally (Interview, D!SRUPT).

5.2.3.2 Different Aims – A Multitude of Black Anti-Racism Organizations

The question “why are there so many anti-black racism groups? Are they really necessary” may arise for some readers. A representative for D!SRUPT highlighted the distinct focuses and also the importance of networking among them. While all these groups address racism, each group has a unique emphasis:

Black Voices is described as an activist group that organizes protests and demonstrations, focusing on political activism. ZARA is the oldest anti-racism organization in Austria, originally founded by white people rather than people of Color, which has contributed to its widespread recognition. Dokustelle specializes in

combating anti-Muslim racism. The Schwarze Frauen Community (Black Women's Community) focuses primarily on empowerment work for Black women. IDB out of all the organizations is the most similar to D!SRUPT, as both organizations document and report on racism and discrimination, particularly in schools. D!SRUPT itself is committed to educational efforts, conducting workshops in schools and training professionals in the education sector (Interview, D!SRUPT).

Despite having different areas of focus, these organizations collaborate and support one another. Networking strengthens their collective impact and ensures that issues outside a specific group's expertise can be redirected to a more suitable organization. Solidarity for one another is important to prevent external forces from dividing or undermining their efforts (Interview, D!SRUPT).

5.2.3.3 Structural Challenges in the Education System

For AEWTASS there is a gap between verbal support and actual action when it comes to addressing racism in Austria. While there is rhetorical agreement, where officials and institutions nod along and express verbal support, there is often a lack of concrete action, particularly in terms of financial investment (Interview, AEWTASS).

The key issue is that real change requires funding, but the government and institutions are not prioritizing this issue enough to allocate the necessary resources. Austria needs to confront and dismantle its inherited colonial mentality, but without proper financial backing, initiatives fail to take off. While discussions in official settings may seem supportive, when it comes to actual implementation, such as securing funds or overcoming opposition, progress stalls (Interview, AEWTASS).

The publishing industry has also been confronted about problematic portrayals or narratives, but publishers prefer to maintain the status quo rather than actively engage in change. One major issue is that writing textbooks is not a

“glorious thing to write. It's a lot of work, it's poorly paid as I understand it and if the publishers aren't aware of the issues revolving around blackness, then things are just approved that are problematic” (Interview, AEWTASS).

Because of this, AEW TASS are actively working to raise awareness among publishers, ensuring they recognize these issues and make necessary changes in the materials they produce (Interview, AEW TASS).

Another aspect is that not only the material but also the teachers have an effect on education, particularly regarding issues like race and representation. An example is given, “two teachers can have the same material and just go at it in a completely different way. One can throw in negative jokes about Africans during the lesson, and the other one can be much more sensitive and appreciative” (Interview, AEW TASS).

In addition, there is also an importance of actively recruiting teachers who reflect the diversity of, in this case Vienna’s, population. The majority of teacher in Vienna are white Austrians, which does not represent the city’s multicultural demographic. Having a more diverse teaching staff could help create a more inclusive and representative education system (Interview, AEW TASS).

The interviewee for D!SRUPT described racism in schools as both structural and institutional. The reason for this is, that teachers typically receive little to no formal education on racism. This means that workshops on the topic only happen when individual teachers or school leadership recognize racism as a problem and take the initiative to invite experts, rather than it being a standard part of teacher training (Interview, D!SRUPT).

They argue that even just an introductory session to racism prevention can make a significant impact by raising awareness among teachers. However, because anti-racism is not a required part of teacher training, whether educators engage with the issue later in their careers is mostly left to chance. This shows how racism in education is deeply embedded in institutional structures (Interview, D!SRUPT).

5.2.3.4 Racism in Textbooks and Everyday School Life

The depiction of Black people and Africa, in school textbooks, is a problem that, in addition to teachers and students, Black organizations have also spoken out against (Interview, AEW TASS, D!SRUPT).

The interviewee for D!SRUPT explained, “I can talk about this with people who are older than me in workshops, and I can also talk to people who are around 10 years old. It’s

always the same one-sided images of Africa” (Interview, D!SRUPT). Africa was and still is portrayed as poor, filled with landscapes and animals, but without cities, infrastructure, or representations of everyday life and achievements of African people (Interview, D!SRUPT).

This kind of representation has a significant psychological impact on children and teenagers. When they are later confronted with a more accurate and diverse image of Africa, they are often shocked because it contradicts what they have learned. These portrayals shape how students perceive Black people, as well as their understanding of African countries and their contributions to the world (Interview, D!SRUPT).

Additionally, racist insults and discrimination against Black students vary from school to school. While Black students experience racism everywhere, the extent and severity depend largely on the school's leadership and teachers. In some schools, racist language, including slurs, is openly used, while in others, such behavior is not tolerated. This underscores the crucial role of educators and school policies in either reinforcing or challenging racism within the education system (Interview, D!SRUPT).

5.2.3.5 Teachers, Students and Anti-Racism Training

This section explores what an anti-racism workshop for teachers might look like.

Whether or not an anti-racism workshop is offered “depends on the school” (Interview, AEWTASS) but a lot of times “there are no special resources for that” (Interview, AEWTASS). When anti-racism education does take place, it is usually in the form of SchILFs (Schulinterne Lehrerfortbildungen), which are internal professional development sessions for teachers. However, in most cases, teachers can choose which training sessions they want to attend, meaning that participation is largely voluntary. It is up to teachers or school administrators to book these workshops, meaning that students do not have a choice in attending, they are required to participate once the workshop is scheduled. The crucial point is that the decision to hold such a workshop ultimately rests with the teacher or school leadership. If they do not see the importance of addressing racism, the workshop simply will not happen, making anti-racism education dependent on the willingness of individual educators rather than being a mandatory part of the curriculum (Interview, D!SRUPT).

D!SRUPT has provided a more in-depth analysis of the challenges surrounding anti-racism training. “I think that teachers are extremely left on their own because I would argue that there are quite a few teachers who are willing to engage with this topic. But, in the end, you always have to do it in your free time” (Interview, D!SRUPT). The interviewee, who is involved in organizing an annual two-day professional development conference for educators in Austria, highlights the strong interest among teachers, 120 participants registered this year alone. Unless a supportive school administration prioritizes such training, teachers are left to seek out anti-racism education voluntarily, often in their free time.

D!SRUPT have also given an insight into what an anti-racism workshop looks like and what they have observed. The classroom dynamic influences how students engage in anti-racism workshops. In some cases, teachers must remain in the room, which can discourage students from speaking openly, especially if they do not feel comfortable with their teacher. However, in other workshops, students are more open, particularly when they have experienced racism but did not previously recognize it as such. Younger students in particular tend to share their experiences and ask whether certain incidents were racist. The D!SRUPT representative notes that students sometimes also use humor as a way to process these situations, indicating a strong need to discuss them.

Additionally, while some students can explicitly identify racist incidents, they do not always associate them with their school environment, instead referring to experiences outside of school. They also highlight how class composition impacts discussions i.e. when a class is majority white, PoC students often remain quiet and listen rather than actively participating. This reflects a broader issue: in predominantly white spaces, students of color may not feel they have room to express their experiences with racism. Simply hearing these discussions can prompt them to reflect on their own experiences more deeply (Interview, D!SRUPT).

In settings with fewer students of color, PoC children may adopt white narratives, downplay racism, or even align themselves with those making racist remarks. This, they suggest, happens when children are still in the process of understanding racism and have not yet developed a critical perspective on it (Interview, D!SRUPT).

There have also been observations about teachers, and a challenge is that teachers form a highly diverse group, some are just starting to realize that racism is a problem, while others are well-versed in critical whiteness theory and capable of engaging in deep discussions. Because of this, workshops typically start at a basic level to ensure everyone can follow along. If the content is too advanced, those unfamiliar with the topic might become defensive or disengage entirely (Interview, D!SRUPT).

To facilitate learning, the workshops focus on *aha moments*, experiences that make participants realize their own biases in a non-confrontational way. For example, they might play classical music and ask teachers to guess its origins. The surprise comes when they reveal that the composers were Black musicians who lived during the time of Mozart and Beethoven but remain largely unknown. This approach helps teachers reflect on structural racism without feeling personally attacked (Interview, D!SRUPT).

The speaker also notes that many teachers feel a strong expectation to know everything. If they are confronted too directly with gaps in their knowledge, they may react defensively. Therefore, the training needs to be structured in a way that encourages self-reflection without making teachers feel ashamed (Interview, D!SRUPT).

Teachers are given an anti-racism argumentation and civil courage training. This training focuses on real situations that may arise in schools and helps teachers understand how to respond effectively. A key aspect of the training is making teachers aware that they *must* react to incidents of racism, “and then it is really about raising awareness that one *must* react. Because otherwise, what does it mean for the children and young people if there is no reaction, if racism is simply downplayed or accepted” (Interview, D!SRUPT).

While teachers often prefer training focused on handling specific situations, they first need a fundamental understanding of what racism actually is. Without this foundational knowledge, they may not even recognize certain forms of racism, especially since racism isn’t just about direct insults or verbal abuse. Teachers need to understand the broader, more systemic and structural aspects of racism to effectively address it in their classrooms (Interview, D!SRUPT).

Language also plays an important role, instead of simply telling people what they can or cannot say, D!SRUPT focus on teaching how racism operates and how it is embedded in

language. The responsibility ultimately lies with individuals, if someone knows that certain words or expressions are racist and still chooses to use them, they cannot act surprised when others react negatively. This approach is crucial because many teachers tend to rely on banning certain words without deeper discussion. The interviewee also expressed,

“I think it is really important that we communicate this because, very often, teachers simply impose bans or prohibitions. But then, children are even more tempted to push those boundaries and deliberately cross the line” (Interview, D!SRUPT).

The representative of AEWTASS has also provided insight into the importance of having a Black teacher in the classroom. Simply being present as a Black educator serves as a powerful example for students, demonstrating that Black individuals can be knowledgeable, passionate, and influential in academic spaces. Additionally, they stress the importance of teaching in a way that is engaging and memorable, essentially striving to be the kind of teacher they would have wanted as a student. Beyond this, they also advocate for incorporating narratives that place Black people at the center of historical and contemporary events, ensuring that diverse perspectives are included in the curriculum (Interview, AEWTASS).

5.2.3.6 Feelings and Reactions

The representative of D!SRUPT has also shared their thoughts on the children's experiences and highlighted the persistent lack of change in the portrayal of Africans.

The interviewee expresses their ongoing shock at the persistent portrayal of Africa in school textbooks, emphasizing how easily this could be changed by simply including different images. They argue that more balanced representations would have a significant impact, yet outdated and one-sided depictions remain (Interview, D!SRUPT).

When discussing children's experiences with racism, the speaker is particularly struck by how young some of them are when they begin facing serious discrimination. They note that in their work with students as young as 10 or 11, children often share deeply troubling experiences, ones that they, personally, never had to endure. They find it alarming that these children must develop resilience at such a young age (Interview, D!SRUPT).

Despite these challenges, the interview partner also finds their work rewarding, particularly when it includes empowerment-focused activities. They highlight the positive impact of presenting children with affirming and diverse representations of Africa, noting how students light up when they see positive depictions that counter prevailing stereotypes (Interview, D!SRUPT).

5.3 Me: Identity and Impact

This chapter will examine how racist experiences affect Black students. Overall, it will display the *feelings*, *coping mechanisms* and the resulting *impact*.

5.3.1 Feelings

Throughout the interviews, the participants were asked to describe their emotions during these experiences because they are not extensively included in statistics and questionnaires. Emotions are important factors to consider, in order to gain a deeper understanding of the affected people and their everyday struggle.

5.3.1.1 Loneliness and Isolation

Loneliness and isolation are common experiences for Black students. Throughout 90-95% of her school years, IP1 was the only Black student in her school. Reflecting on this, she shared, “bluntly put, I just accepted it. Back then, I took it in and accepted that someone like me was a rarity. It’s a harsh way to label it but looking back, I actually felt alone very often. I was lonely” (Interview, IP1). Her sense of isolation was compounded by the fact that none of her classmates looked like her, and she struggled to find common ground with them. Over time she learned to accept the fact that she was lonely.

Loneliness can also stem from the absence of other People of Color (PoC) in one’s environment. IP6 expressed a desire to be surrounded by more PoCs, regardless of their specific background or ethnicity. For her, the key factor was having others who could relate to the shared experience of navigating a predominantly white space. She expected that a well-known, internationally recognized university would naturally have a diverse student body, even if the program is taught in German. She assumed that such a university would attract students from different backgrounds and bring a certain level of diversity. However, in reality she found that this expectation was not met at all. She describes the feeling as follows, “because I was the only Black person there, I

experienced a huge sense of loneliness. And even though there were a few people I got along with well, I never truly felt like I belong” (Interview, IP6).

IP7 reflects on how her friend group changed frequently over time. In the past, she had a small, close-knit circle of friends. While these friends did not actively participate in racist behavior, they also never spoke out against it, promoting a feeling of loneliness. She felt left alone by her friends and over time she realized that her friends had very problematic views on immigrants (Interview, IP7).

Other forms of loneliness stem from active exclusion, as seen in IP8's experience. In primary and middle school, he interacted with other children from ethnic backgrounds, but despite this, he never felt a strong connection with them. Over time, this lack of connection led to feelings of isolation and exclusion (Interview, IP8). Another instance of exclusion was experienced by IP9, who found himself isolated when no one wanted to sit with him at the lunch table or share a room with him on school trips (see Chapter 4.2.5).

Loneliness can be intensified by the feeling of being misunderstood and the need to advocate for oneself without external support. “To be honest, I often felt misunderstood in many situations. And that feeling contributes to loneliness, or at least it did for me. I spent a lot of time alone” (Interview, IP8). This sense of isolation is also illustrated by IP10's experience. During an oral exam conducted in front of his class, he felt unfairly singled out by his teacher. As the situation escalated, his classmates took notice, recognizing the teacher's behavior as inappropriate and excessive. When IP10 left the class and returned, his classmates acknowledged that the teacher's behavior had been excessive and out of line. However, despite recognizing the unfairness of the situation, no one spoke up at the time or confronted the teacher afterward. This feeling of isolation and loneliness is a pattern that followed him throughout his school days (Interview, IP10).

As previously discussed, Black students are often the only ones to challenge racist or derogatory narratives in the classroom. For instance, IP2, who was the sole student to speak out against a racist video produced by an NGO (see Chapter 5.2.1). Alongside other Black students, she actively confronted a professor regarding questionable behavior (see chapter 5.2.3).

The pattern of loneliness through social isolation and passive bystander behavior highlights how a lack of peer support can reinforce feelings of exclusion. Even when justice is evident, students facing discrimination are often left to defend themselves alone.

5.3.1.2 The Feeling after Racist Incidents

It is also crucial to examine how the interviewees perceived and reacted to their experiences of racism and discrimination, as this offers valuable insight into the emotional and psychological consequences of such encounters. It contributes to a deeper understanding of the long-term effects on individuals. The data reveals a range of emotional, psychological and behavioral responses.

Hurt, betrayal and feeling emotionally wounded are common emotions shown in the data, especially when faced with racist comments from authority figures, and peers (Interview, IP1, IP2, IP7). IP1 explained her reaction to her teacher's racist comment "I was very hurt; I just didn't express it. I was completely hurt and disappointed, and angry" (Interview, IP1).

Frustration (Interview, IP1, IP2, IP8, IP10), anger (Interview, IP1, IP9), feelings of unfairness (Interview, IP10), feelings of not wanting to go to school (Interview, IP6, IP10) and helplessness (Interview, IP2) were common emotions, particularly when acts of discrimination were repeated over time without meaningful consequences or change. IP9 expressed his frustration over being bullied by his teacher stating, "it was very frustrating for me. What could I have done? The teacher has your whole future in his hands" (Interview, IP9). Other sources of frustration included being mistaken for another Black student (Interview, IP2), feeling isolated when speaking out against injustice (Interview, IP2, IP8, IP10), and the persistent negative portrayal of Africa (Interview, IP8).

The racist experiences not only had emotional impacts but also psychological consequences. IP2 mentioned that she had nightmares when her university professor repeatedly used the N-word during his lessons, "it was very triggering for me and I legitimately had nightmares because of his lessons" (Interview, IP2). There is also a realization that one might not be fully aware of the effects racism can have on oneself at that point in time, however eventually the awareness sets in. "It's tough once you realize

it and it definitely takes a toll on your mental health” (Interview, IP6). Other mental health strains include anxiety (Interview, IP10) and general psychological exhaustion (Interview, IP5, IP6, IP8, IP9).

Social and institutional struggles are another result of frequent racist experiences. Over time Black students develop a distrust in authority (Interview, IP6, IP7, IP8, IP9, IP10), both in teachers and educational institutions. IP9 stated, “I saw no hope. I no longer saw hope in the teachers” (Interview, IP9) after he realized that there is no one he could turn to for help. This also indicates that there is a feeling that Black students have to carry the burden of racism largely on their own, as there is little to no institutional intervention. This lack of support intensifies feelings of powerlessness and frustration, as they felt isolated in their efforts to confront racism.

The feeling of powerlessness and lack of support can also lead to reactive emotions. IP9 explained his reasoning for using aggression after a racist encounter with a classmate,

“At this point enough was enough. I’m very lenient but not when it comes to my family. At that moment, it was really like, ‘You are going to get hit.’ And that’s exactly what happened. Then I just hit back out of pure aggression. I didn’t even think about it... I just lashed out” (Interview, IP9).

In retrospect he realized that violence is not the answer to solving problems as it’s not the right thing to do and he also learned “just because I didn’t start it doesn’t mean I can’t be to blame [...] there is a Black boy standing there, and a white boy crying. Of course I’ll get blamed” (Interview, IP9).

Repeated exposure to racism can have profound effects, including on self-perception, among other aspects. These effects will be further examined in the following sub-chapter.

5.3.1.3 Perception of Differential Treatment

The biggest challenge for many Black students is the unfair treatment they receive from teachers, which includes disparities in opportunities and grading compared to their classmates.

The perception of double standards reinforces the feeling of unequal treatment. IP8 recalls an incident where a classmate deliberately tripped and pushed him, causing him to lose a piece of his tooth. Reflecting on the response from teachers and classmates, he shared, “from my perspective, it seemed like the others didn’t really care about why or how it happened, simply because it happened to me” (Interview, IP8). He noted, “I think that if it had happened to someone else, it would have been a huge deal, and the perpetrator would have been blamed forever. But in my case, it was more like, ‘*Well, it’s not that bad*’”. His frustration stemmed not only from this specific incident but also from the broader pattern of indifference toward the repeated physical violence and racism he endured.

Another example that highlights the perception of differential treatment is IP5’s experience with her teacher’s response to being called the N-word. Instead of addressing the issue, the teacher dismissed it by saying, “you are an N-word. And if you have a problem with that then you should settle it with him [perpetrator]” (Interview, IP5). She contrasted this with an incident just weeks earlier, when a classmate was the target of blonde jokes. In that case, the same teacher immediately stepped in, reprimanding the bullies and telling them to stop. Reflecting on this disparity, IP5 recalled, “But when it was about me, her reaction was more like, ‘*well, just handle it yourself. Figure it out on your own.*’ And things like that” (Interview, IP5). This contrast in responses reinforced the feeling that her experiences of racism were not taken seriously.

The biggest sense of differential treatment, executed by teachers, is when it comes to grades. One such instance has already been discussed (see Chapter 4.1.3). Additional experiences highlight cases of unfair grading. IP10 acknowledges that he was not a student that applied himself a lot in school and often neglected his homework. However, when he did do them, his teacher would mark everything with a red pen. He says that it was “corrected in an overly strict manner” (Interview, IP10), suggesting a disparity in how his work was assessed compared to that of his peers. He then tested out his theory of unfair corrections. He followed all the expected steps – organizing his materials, completing his homework properly with the correct date, and getting them checked and signed by the teacher. Despite his efforts, he still received a poor grade. He admits that his exams were not great, but pointed out that, “typically, students who consistently do

their homework and participate in class are given some leeway when it comes to their final grade” (Interview, IP10). He observed that other classmates who performed similarly were still able to pass, but for some reason, this standard did not apply to him. This experience reinforced the feeling of being treated unfairly compared to his peers.

In general, there is a notion that other students, in this case who are not Black, are given more opportunities to improve their grades, while Black students on the other hand are not given that same opportunity (Interview, IP5, IP8, IP9, IP10).

While this chapter focused on feelings and perception, the next chapter will look at coping mechanisms.

5.3.2 Coping Mechanisms

Throughout their educational careers, the interviewees have developed coping mechanisms in response to racism, including strategies to avoid it and ways of normalizing it for themselves.

5.3.2.1 Behavior in Response to Racism

A very common way of dealing with racist insults is *just accepting it* and *just tolerating it* (Interview, IP1, IP6, IP10). IP1 explains that a reason for tolerating racist insults is because “I don’t think that I complained to anyone. I never really felt save, especially when it came to racist or discriminatory remarks. I wouldn’t have dared to go to a teacher” (Interview, IP1). Her reasoning for it is that the majority of teachers were white Austrians, who themselves made racist and discriminatory remarks. There was never a safe space, or an opportunity provided within the school system to speak up about these experiences. Instead, she had to process these incidents with other like-minded individuals (Interview, IP1).

Fear is another aspect that prevents Black students from telling authority figures about their experiences. For instance, IP6 mentioned that as a young person it is difficult to fully understand or assess the situation, let alone be confident in one’s own judgement. Even if the gut feeling suggested that racism occurred, it is hard to prove. She explained “when it comes to racism, people are still hesitant to call it out because it is seen as a very serious accusation. Without proof, it’s difficult to make it stand. As a child it would never have occurred to me to take that route” (Interview, IP6).

Fear was also a hurdle for IP9, who was accused of sending a classmate to the hospital. His classmate had racially abused and insulted him and his family. He acknowledges to have retaliated by insulting her with strong and vulgar language as well. As a consequence of this argument, according to the teacher, the person he insulted allegedly experienced heart rhythm issues and had to be hospitalized. The person left out the part where they started the racial abuse, leaving everyone to believe that IP9 is a monster. He was however, scared to tell his version of the story in fear of not being believed and potentially receiving an expulsion from school. “I thought to myself, it doesn’t matter if I tell them that she was racist because she’s the one in hospital not me. They will say I did something wrong, and they will kick me out of school” (Interview, IP9).

Another example of fear is not wanting to be seen as an overreactor (Interview, IP6). IP6’s described her fear of not reporting as follows “I didn’t want to make a big deal out of it... I didn’t want to turn it into something major. Because otherwise I would be made to feel like I’m overreacting” (Interview, IP6). It highlights the internalized pressure to downplay her experiences to avoid being dismissed or invalidated.

Similar to IP6, IP8 also did not report his experiences as his fear was being labeled as a *problem child* or a *troublemaker*, which can lead to difficulties at school and at home. Teachers would see him as a troublemaker rather than address the real problem. At home, he faced a similar reaction. Rather than receiving support, he was told to ignore the situation and walk away. With age and experience he understood why his parents advised him this way, it did not help with the feelings of isolation or abandonment.

The primary reason Black students do not report their experiences is a lack of support. This includes denying racist experiences (Interview, IP 10), downplaying racist experiences (Interview, IP8, IP9, IP10) and no point of contact (Interview, IP1, IP2, IP5, IP6, IP7, IP8, IP9, IP10). IP2 described her experience, “I didn’t really encounter much empathy, ‘because it’s not a big deal they don’t mean it like that.’ Those were the classic excuses” (Interview, IP2). IP10 recounts a similar experience with a teacher who told him, “Don’t you think you’re overreacting a bit? Don’t make yourself so important” (Interview, IP10), echoing IP2’s experience.

IP6's reasoning for not reporting racist experiences was also that she did not have the courage and the backbone to communicate her experiences. She also mentioned that there was no support system to turn to. IP2 summarizes the situation as "we didn't really have opportunities to address it. It just wasn't a thing" (Interview, IP2), showing that there is a lack of opportunities to speak out.

A lack of consequences for the perpetrators is another reason for not reporting racist incidents (Interview, IP2, IP10). IP10 explained that his experiences were downplayed by many teachers and that at most a consequence would be an entry into the class register (Interview, IP10).

The sense of helplessness also plays a crucial role in why Black students choose not to report racist incidents (Interview, IP2, IP10). IP2 expressed her doubts, questioning "is it going to help if I report this? Are they actually going to do something?" (Interview, IP2). The perceived lack of consequences led IP10 to stop reporting incidents altogether, instead feeling compelled to handle the situation on his own. IP8 was also of the opinion that reporting to an authority figure would not help his cause, as racist slurs were said to him in front of his teachers, and they did not intervene.

This leads to the next issue: teachers often remain passive and unresponsive when racism occurs (Interview, IP5) and tend to downplay its significance (Interview, IP7). When IP5 and a classmate reported a racist incident, their teacher simply responded, "and what do you want me to do now?" (Interview, IP5). Other common reactions include dismissing racism as harmless or nonexistent, with statements like, "they are just kids. It's a phase" (Interview, IP7), "it can happen" (Interview, IP7), "there is no racism in Austria" (Interview, IP7) and "they don't mean it like that. They are only joking around" (Interview, IP8). These responses, frequently heard by IP7 and IP8, illustrate a broader pattern of minimization and inaction.

A lack of sensitivity and understanding can also discourage Black students from reporting their experiences. IP7 recalls that her teachers were aware of her classmates' racist behavior but failed to intervene. She explains, "they were absolutely not sensitive at all. We had told them what happened, but they didn't do anything about it" (Interview, IP7).

This inaction reinforces a sense of helplessness, making students feel that speaking up will not lead to meaningful change.

While Black students often choose not to report their experiences with racism due to a lack of viable options or support systems, they develop various strategies to navigate these challenges.

5.3.2.2. Strategies and Defense Mechanisms

Given that Black students often refrain from reporting experiences of racism, they have developed various strategies and coping mechanisms to protect themselves, avoid becoming targets, and negotiate their school environment.

One of the strategies includes conforming to the environment through various ways. IP1's, who was always a quiet student and wanted to be left alone, and believed to avoid problems related to racism and exclusion was, "the more I adapt and blend in, the fewer issues I would have" (Interview, IP1). As a result, she consciously avoided engaging in discussions and refrained from expressing her opinions. She felt that arguing or explaining her perspective was exhausting and pointless because others would not understand her experiences anyway (Interview, IP1).

Other forms of conforming and trying not to stand out are ignoring the situation. IP5's initial strategy was to ignore her attackers, believing that by not responding she was showing that the perpetrators were not important enough to deserve her attention. However, over time, she realized that ignoring it also had a downside as it made her appear weak. By staying silent and not standing up for herself, she unintentionally signaled that people could continue treating her this way without consequences.

Similar to IP5's strategy, IP8 used resilience in the face of adversity. While he acknowledges feeling sad at times, he never reached a point of complete despair or hopelessness. He expresses a sense of endurance, attributing it to *Black power*, emphasizing the remarkable strength that many Black individuals possess. He described the feeling as,

"it's funny, but actually true. The perseverance of many Black people is so strong, it's unbelievable. I don't want to sound discriminatory, but many white people, if they went through what we experienced, it would be over for them. Which, of course, I wouldn't wish on anyone!" (Interview, IP8).

The statement highlights the perceived disparity in resilience due to lived experiences of racism and adversity. He stated that he often stayed calm since his belief was “in the end I can’t lose if I don’t react” (Interview, IP9). Other reasons for not reacting included a desire to avoid creating problems, the influence of his father, who advised against using physical self-defense, and a concern about jeopardizing his academic future.

IP10's strategy was to adapt by altering himself to fit in, despite knowing it was not his true self. While he was aware that he wasn't being authentic, he felt compelled to do so to avoid further complications. He explained, “I had to do it so that it wouldn’t lead to even more problems, or to make it even more exhausting than it already was, the whole school experience” (Interview, IP10). His definition of conforming included being friends with people he would normally not be friends with, as in school there is often a popularity system, where being at the bottom of the social hierarchy can be difficult. This struggle led him to seek validation from the *cool kids*, in order to avoid being seen as the lowest level of the social order (Interview, IP10).

Adapting to European beauty standards serves as a means for Black women to conform and minimize their exposure to racism. A common method, as highlighted in the interviews, is chemically relaxing their hair to avoid drawing attention (Interview, IP1, IP5, IP7). This adaptation is not merely a personal choice but rather a response to societal expectations and racialized beauty norms that dictate acceptability.

The fear of jeopardizing their academic future is another reason why Black students often feel compelled to tolerate racist attacks. IP10 reflected on hearing a story about a student who clashed with a teacher and ended up being expelled or forced to leave school due to frequent issues. He observed that while this might happen with a white student, he feels that if a Black student, in this case him, were to have a similar problem, the consequences would be much more severe. It created a sense of pressure to conform and avoid conflict with teachers, as he feels that any misstep could lead to repercussions for him. He expressed the idea, that in his case, he had no choice but to fit in, since he felt there was no room for mistakes (Interview, IP10).

Another defense mechanism developed by Black students is intentional self-isolation. IP5 expressed that she prefers spending time alone, “and it might be because I think it’s

safer for me and I'm not constantly exposed to attacks" (Interview, IP5). Self-isolation can also lead to finding ways to skip class or even skipping school in the worst-case scenario. IP10 said that his strategy was "every other lesson, I would say, '*I need to go to the bathroom*', but I didn't actually need to go. I would just walk around the school building, but I just had this feeling of 'I don't want to be here'" (Interview, IP10). IP6 felt so uncomfortable in her school that she would skip school all together. She recalled a time when she frequently skipped classes simply because she did not want to be there anymore. Looking back, she expressed how, if she was a teacher and noticed a similar pattern in a student, especially if that student was the only Black student in the class, she would have taken the initiative to check in on them. This statement underscores the lack of support and awareness from her own teachers, who failed to recognize or address her struggles.

Another defense mechanism used to avoid being targeted is humor. IP6 reflects on how, especially in primary school, she often played the role of the class clown. She believes this is a common coping strategy among Black students, as it is both reinforced by media portrayals and serves as a shield against hostility. By making others laugh, she was able to blend in and deflect negative attention. For a long time, she believed this was simply her personality, but later realized it was a defense mechanism, "if people made fun of me, I would simply take it with humor" (Interview, IP6). Over time, however, she recognized that this wasn't her true self and began distancing herself from her classmates.

The data suggests that academic excellence can serve as a protective factor, shielding students from negative attention and potential conflicts with teachers. By excelling in their studies, students may reduce the likelihood of being targeted or facing additional challenges within the school environment. IP2 acknowledged, "I had it a bit easier because I did relatively well in school. As a result, the teachers also had a certain level of respect for me, or at least that's what I would dare to assume" (Interview, IP2). IP1 shared a similar experience, she stated "If I get good grades and participate quietly, then I get my reward, and everyone leaves me alone". She observed that her Black male classmates who spoke up against injustice or racism, challenged the teachers, or defended their opinions were often labeled as troublemakers. The students were not necessarily disruptive but simply asserting themselves. However, their assertiveness led to negative

perceptions from teachers, who dismissed them as unruly. Wanting to avoid this label, the speaker chose to remain as unnoticed as possible, prioritizing compliance over confrontation to avoid unnecessary struggles (Interview, IP2).

If all other options fail, Black students may choose to change schools or switch their university courses. For IP8, the decision to transfer was driven by a teacher whose persistent unfair treatment made staying unbearable. Similarly, IP10 faced ongoing discrimination from a teacher, ultimately leading him to change schools, a decision that not only improved his academic performance but also allowed him to feel safer in his new environment. In higher education, IP2 was forced to switch her university course due to a professor who repeatedly used the N-word. Reflecting on this, she stated, “Which, in hindsight, was the right decision, but I find it a bit difficult that this was the reason I switched courses” (Interview, IP2).

5.3.2.3 Normalizing Racism through the Interview Partners

The interviews reveal a pattern in which the interviewees tend to normalize racism or downplay the severity of their racist experiences, often minimizing their impact rather than fully acknowledging the harm they have caused.

For instance, IP2 described the use of the N-word by another student as a typical insult, suggesting that such language was commonplace in her experiences rather than an exceptional or shocking act of racism. This reaction indicates a level of desensitization, as she no longer perceives the word with the same weight or outrage that might be expected in a different context.

IP7 also demonstrated a tendency to normalize racism. During school, she was frequently called the N-word and subjected to other racist slurs by her classmates. Yet, after school, these same individuals would visit her home, or she would go to theirs to play, as if the insults and discrimination never happened. This dynamic suggests that racism was treated as something casual or insignificant, rather than a serious issue, further reinforcing its normalization in her social environment.

IP8 reflected on how experiencing and learning to navigate difficult situations, such as racism or hardship, from a young age builds resilience. He suggested that because Black students in an predominantly white environment had to deal with these challenges early

in life, they naturally developed the ability to cope over time. In contrast, he expressed frustration toward people who only face adversity later in life, at around 28 or 30 years old, and struggle to handle it. He sees this delayed learning process as lack of preparedness, questioning why these individuals have difficulty managing their lives when he had to develop resilience much earlier. He sees racism as a part of life that especially Black individuals go through life.

IP9, who also labelled many racist experiences as *a small thing* since, the significance of an issue depends on perspective. He acknowledges that what might seem like a minor issue to him could be seen as a big deal to someone else. This highlights the subjective nature of experiences, what one person can easily dismiss, another might find extremely hurtful. It suggests an awareness that reactions to situations are influenced by personal experiences and background. However, he does admit, that the things said to him were horrible.

Another example that displays the normalization of experienced racism, is IP9 statement “I know, you know the saying ‘we Black people have to work harder than everyone else’” (Interview, IP9), which normalizes systemic inequality. It implies an acceptance of the idea that Black individuals are expected to work harder than others to achieve the same level of success. Instead of challenging the unfairness of this reality, the statement presents it as a given fact, reinforcing the notion that extra effort is simply the way things are for Black people.

5.3.3 Identity and Impact

Experiencing racism can have long-lasting effects on an individual, whether felt immediately or resurfacing later in life. This chapter examines how racism has impacted the interviewees' mental health, self-perception, and academic performance, including their tendency to second-guess their experiences.

5.3.3.1 Impact on Self

IP1 struggled with an inferiority complex and identity conflict, as she viewed herself through a white gaze, mirroring how others perceived her. She explained that this perspective shaped her self-perception, making it difficult to see herself beyond that lens. Additionally, she described an internal conflict when confronting racist stereotypes

about people from formerly colonized regions, who are often labeled as lazy, incompetent, or unintelligent. This led her to question her own identity: 'You ask yourself, am I like this too? Is this how people perceive me if I don't give 110% and prove to them that I'm not like that?' (Interview, IP1). Her reflection underscores the psychological burden of racial stereotyping and the pressure to counteract prejudiced perceptions through excessive effort.

She also describes the deep-rooted identity struggles she faced growing up as a mixed-race child. Despite having the same parents, her lighter-skinned sister benefited from a *white pass*, meaning she was admired for features “like her long, curly hair and almond-shaped eyes” (Interview, IP1). The lack of diverse representation in the media reinforced this insecurity, and as a result she tried to make herself as invisible as possible, attempting to conform to Eurocentric beauty standards by relaxing her hair. At some point in time, she wished she could scrub off her skin color.

She reflected on the internalized pressure to conform to European beauty standards. In her experience, the closer a person aligns with European ideals – whether in skin tone or hair texture – the more favorably they are perceived. This mindset was instilled in her from a young age through comments such as, “You don't need to go out in the sun anymore; you're already dark enough” (Interview, IP1). At school, she was confronted with negative portrayals of Africa and its people, creating an even bigger internal conflict. On one hand, society fetishizes aspects of Blackness, like skin tone or physical feature, but on the other hand, it refuses to accept or embrace the lived realities of Black individuals.

IP5 explained that experiences with racism had lasting effects on her self-confidence and self-perception, which included self-doubt and doubting the own abilities. She stated that experiencing racism or exclusion can damage one's overall sense of self-worth and belief in their own potential.

IP6 described her struggle with imposter syndrome, which is not solely an internal experience but also influenced by how she anticipates others perceive her. She feels that some people assume she attained her current position solely because she is Black, rather than due to her own abilities. This perception reinforces her feelings of not fully belonging and the constant need to prove herself.

She also reflected on her heightened visibility as a Black person in predominantly white spaces, emphasizing that being the only Black person in the entire program ensures that those around her notice her presence, even if they claim to be *colorblind*. IP6 also considered how her racial identity was perceived differently by herself and her peers while growing up, “I feel that when I was very young, I rarely perceived myself as Black” (Interview, IP6). However, to her classmates it was obvious, they immediately identified her as Black.

This contrast became particularly significant when examining how Black individuals and Africa are portrayed in educational materials and the media. She pointed out that when children are exposed to stereotypical or racist depictions of Black people, their classmates may immediately associate those images with a Black peer – even if that child does not initially make the same connection. She argued that when generations of children grow up with these stereotypes, whether through school curricula or media, it profoundly influences their perception of Black people in real life. This is especially impactful in small towns, where direct interactions with Black individuals may be rare, making media representation a crucial factor in shaping public perception. She criticized that “if it couldn’t be expected from the media back then, at least it should have come from the school. But that didn’t exist at all” (Interview, IP6).

She questions, how her life would have turned out if she was not Black, as she simply wanted to look like the other children in her class. This desire was less about rejecting her race and more about wanting to blend in with her peers, over time she grew to accept her Blackness. Her Black identity is something she learned rather than it being imposed on her, as she grew up in a white household. Her understanding of being Black and what it means to her was not shaped by her upbringing, but by her own experiences and self-determination. While she faced negative societal perceptions and discrimination, she chose to embrace and define the positive aspects of their identity (Interview, IP6).

She also highlights the ongoing nature of the trauma associated with being Black. Although life may present only a few overtly racist experiences, the constant threat of discrimination and microaggressions leads to a persistent internal struggle. She describes this as carrying a *constant trauma*, where racism is an ever-present part of life, continually reminding her of past painful experiences. Unlike other forms of trauma that

may heal with time, racism never truly goes away and continues to reopen old wounds, making it a deep, persistent source of psychological strain (Interview, IP6).

Despite the challenges, IP6 expresses that she does take pride in her Black identity. However, she also acknowledges moments of doubt and wonders about how much easier life might be if she didn't carry this burden, if she didn't look different from those around them, and if she were free from the weight of racial trauma (Interview, IP6).

IP7's encounter with racism made her feel uncomfortable in her own skin and also pushed her a little into having a helper syndrome. As a child, she started ripping out her hair due to the traumatic experiences she made, with classmates spitting in it and she avoided the sun, as she believed it would make her lighter (Interview, IP7).

IP8's experiences initially led him to feel self-pity, but after reflecting on his life, he came to the realization, "I'm still here. I managed to survive it" (Interview, IP8). This shift in perspective helped him develop inner strength. As a child, these experiences made him wish he weren't Black, something he can no longer imagine feeling today. Additionally, his experiences instilled in him a deep hatred for injustice (Interview, IP8).

The constant trauma has shaped him as the human he is today, he has developed a heightened sense of self-awareness and actively tries to prevent being seen as the *attacker* or the *cause of trouble*, which he also developed the tendency to avoid problems before they even arise. He is highly proactive in thinking about potential conflicts and takes steps to prevent them, even if he is not the cause. He also reflected on his understanding of hatred, both in others and within himself. He acknowledged that when people carry hatred, he can understand where it comes from. For him, recognizing the root cause of hatred has become a way of coping, as understanding its origins provides some clarity. However, he also acknowledges that while understanding the source of hatred may help, it is not enough to make it disappear. Despite his awareness, he admits that the hatred he has felt as a result of his experiences still lingers within him (Interview, IP8).

IP9's experiences made him more resilient, and he acknowledges that his experiences have had a significant impact on him as a person, particularly on an emotional level. However, rather than letting these challenges defeat him or make him feel like giving up,

he used them as motivation for self-improvement and activism. Instead of being overwhelmed, he channeled his emotions into constructive actions, asking himself how he could improve, help others, and advocate for Black people.

IP10's time as a young teenager was "very grim" (Interview, IP10) and sad. While he states that he was not depressed, he does acknowledge that he isolated himself more from people and did not like interacting with people as much.

5.3.3.2 Impact on Academia

Experiencing racism in an educational setting can have effects on the individual's academic performance.

IP6's math teacher, who was constantly cruel to her in front of the entire class, had a direct effect on her academic performance. Looking back, she now realizes that his behavior was most likely racially motivated. His actions caused her to fail and repeat the grade again. She sees this as a clear example of how a teacher's deliberate actions hindered her educational progress, reinforcing the idea that racism can have direct, tangible consequences on a student's future.

Being the only Black student in her new school made her feel lonely and she had a deep feeling of not fitting in with her peers, this in turn had an effect on her grades, she recalled "I no longer had fun at school anymore" (Interview, IP6). Her academic struggles weren't due to a lack of ability but rather to an environment where she felt out of place. Her experience highlights the emotional and social challenges that can impact academic motivation and performance, especially for students who feel like outsiders in predominantly white or exclusive spaces.

IP7 reflected on how her school experience was impacted by racism. She described feeling reluctant to participate in class or speak up because every time she did, her peers would use it as an excuse to make racist comments or mock her. This created a fear of being ridiculed or targeted, so she chose to remain silent in class, even though she was paying attention. When it came to oral exams, she chose not to speak, which negatively affected her grades.

Racism also leads to changes in university courses (Interview, IP2) or schools (Interview, IP8, IP10) when individuals feel uncomfortable in their previous environment.

5.3.3.3 Perception of having to Work Harder

Black students have the perception that they need to work harder than their white classmates (Interview, IP1, IP7, IP8, IP9, IP10).

IP7's experience in physical education shows this. She reflected on a competitive situation in gym class (a sprint race), where they had a white female competitor. While both were fighting for first place, her white classmate's success was attributed to her hard work and practice, whereas the interviewee's success was viewed through the lens of racial advantage. She notes that her race was seen as an *unfair advantage*. This perspective was framed not as racism but as a perceived positive trait. This attitude, however, overlooked the fact that IP7 was putting in as much effort as her classmates.

IP8 also mentioned that he feels he always had to fight for his grades, while his classmates were always given the chance to prove themselves. IP9 explained: "[...] and of course, it's the Black student who isn't allowed to do extra work, only the white students. And I mean, these are small things, but when it happens so often [...]" (Interview, IP9). He underlined his statement with the quote "I know, you know the saying 'we Black people have to work harder than everyone else'" (Interview, IP9).

5.3.3.4 Questioning own Experience

Being the only Black person in a predominantly white environment can often cause individuals to second-guess their experiences. The inability to directly prove instances of racism, relying instead on a gut feeling, can make it easier for others to dismiss or gaslight those experiences, leading them to question whether the situation was truly racist. IP9 shares an example of a teacher covertly being mean to him: "If it happens once, okay, maybe it was a coincidence. The second time, probably, but by the third and fifth time, it's just obvious" (interview, IP9). This highlights how repeated encounters with microaggressions, or discrimination can make it increasingly difficult to deny the existence of racism, even when others attempt to downplay it.

IP8 explained how being alone in situations involving racism or discrimination can lead to self-doubt and confusion,

"you get gaslighted to the point where you can't do anything. And then you start asking yourself more and more, okay, can you trust your gut feeling? Like, when

you're alone. Back then, when I was a child. It gets better as you become an adult. But yeah, that was a lot” (Interview, IP8).

His sense of doubt was especially prevalent during childhood, but as he grew older, it became easier to handle.

5.4 Me and Them: a Harmonious Coexistence?

The interview partners have expressed strategies and procedures that can, in their eyes, facilitate life for students with an ethnic background but also most importantly for Black children and Black students.

Support and understanding are important factors that need to be implemented for a safe and peaceful environment. A desire and progressive method is for schools to have places or resources where students can address and deal with their experiences of racism and discrimination. Such support systems or points of contact within schools should help students work through difficult and sensitive issues (Interview, IP1, IP2). Support also means taking the matter serious, IP2 explained, “they [Black children] need to have a person they can turn to, someone who takes them seriously, who sees them, and who also does something about it” (Interview, IP2). She also believes that creating a support system or an institution a victim of racism can go to is necessary since “society is not getting any whiter. I believe we all know this, we should all be aware of it, as a society” (Interview, IP2).

Another potential form of support can be through the help of a school psychologist. IP5 sees it as an importance of having structures or support systems in place where students know they can find help and be supported. According to her, school psychologists are available in many schools as professionals outside of teachers, providing a safe space for students to talk about their issues if needed. She also emphasized the value of these kinds of resources, suggesting they are crucial for students to feel supported and heard (Interview, IP5).

Support can and should not only be provided by teachers and psychologists but also the parents. IP10 mentioned,

“simply support from the parents is also enough. I believe that is the most important thing, because when you have support and understanding from your parents, you definitely have more strength to resist what happens at school or university” (Interview, IP10).

There is a believe that when a student knows their family is behind them, it gives them more strength to stand up to teachers or classmates when necessary. IP10 also points out that the early school years are crucial for personal development and having that kind of support from home can make a significant difference in navigating daily challenges during this period (Interview, IP10).

Another way to simplify and facilitate the life for Black students is by way of anti-racism education and further anti-racism training (Interview, IP1, IP6). IP1 discussed the importance of integrating anti-racism education into the school system, especially in the context of ethics classes. She suggests that more awareness and training should be provided, including inviting anti-racism trainers to work with both students and faculty. These training sessions should be mandatory, suggesting they should take place annually as part of professional development, “because at the end of the day, we simply have a racism problem, and we don’t need to discuss that. Just like a colleague once told me ‘*But not all Austrians are racist*’” (Interview, IP1).

In addition to anti-racism education, the data shows, that there is a need for reform in the school curriculum (Interview, IP1, IP6). IP1 believes that the syllabus has not changed much since the second World War. She thinks it is important to feel seen because, “I am who I am, and someone cares about who I am and how I look. And I have a place here [society], and it is given to me, and I don’t have to fight for it” (Interview, IP1). Schools should not only acknowledge students’ stories but also integrate their cultural and historical backgrounds into everyday learning. She conveyed a desire for students to feel accepted and valued without having to constantly fight for their place in society or school.

IP6 expresses hope for more diversity in the educational curriculum. She acknowledges that African history and Black history does not have to be the main focus in history class. However, it should be taught in a more objective, comprehensive, and neutral way.

Furthermore, the *white gaze* should be removed from the curriculum. IP6 also criticized the superficial treatment of topics, where only brief or stereotypical depictions like “showing a few huts” (Interview, IP6) are given, rather than offering a deep and accurate exploration.

The data also shows how acts racism should be dealt with in school, or by teachers. IP6 mentioned a system that is commonly seen in companies, namely the idea of having anonymous reporting systems. She did acknowledge that her school had “things like trust teachers or people you could have gone to, but no one went to them. I wouldn’t have gone to them either, definitely not” (Interview, IP6). Overall, the idea is to have the option to report misbehavior and racism anonymously, be it through teachers or students.

For IP10 it is important that there is an overall understanding that racism exists, and it is treated accordingly, meaning “that it escalates up the hierarchy and doesn’t just stay with the class teacher, but that it also goes to the principal and is discussed there, and that there are consequences for the person that practices racism” (Interview, IP10). He also highlights that teachers’ actions should be investigated if necessary and parents should be involved in discussions about their children’s behavior.

6. Discussion

The aim of this chapter is to synthesize and interpret the findings in relation to the theoretical framework established in this thesis. This analysis will provide a comprehensive answer to the research question, *how does racism manifest in the daily lives of Africans in the Austrian education system?* The results will be presented in three sections: student, teacher and organization.

6.1 Students

Overall, the results from the students’ point of view indicate that racism, whether institutional, structural, or societal, remains a pervasive issue in Austria and its education system. Racism is not only direct and verbal but can also have hidden traits. It also not only practiced by students but also by teachers and in some cases even parents.

The interviews revealed that racism is a pervasive societal issue. Parents influence their children's behavior, teachers often fail to take complaints and concerns seriously, and institutions appear reluctant to implement meaningful changes within the system.

While students tend to be more direct in their interactions, teachers are often perceived as more subtle in their actions. Black children, however, are confronted with racism from an early age, which can leave them feeling confused, as they may not fully understand why their peers or authority figures are behaving in such a manner or what is occurring.

When racism occurs, victims often feel unheard and dismissed, with no safe space to turn to. Their experiences are downplayed or trivialized by either the perpetrators or authority figures. As a result, racism becomes normalized and is not recognized as a serious issue, leading Black individuals to feel discouraged from reporting these incidents.

Black students are often the only ones who must actively confront racist portrayals or statements in the classroom, highlighting a broader lack of understanding, critical thinking, and concern within the majority society.

The effects of racism on the interview participants include feelings of loneliness, the development of coping mechanisms to navigate daily life, the normalization of racist behaviors, and a significant impact on their personal identity and self-perception. In some cases, it can even have an effect on their mental health and their academic performances.

Subtle and covert acts of racism are particularly challenging to address, as they often lack tangible proof. While only the victim can truly feel the impact of racism, they are left without concrete evidence. As a result, they are frequently gaslit, made to doubt their own experiences, and led to believe that what they encountered did not happen. Covert acts of racism by teachers are particularly difficult to address, as students are often not believed over an authority figure.

6.2 Teachers

The teachers' perspectives additionally highlight a significant issue with racism within the Austrian education system. A lack of diversity among colleagues can create challenges

for Black teachers, as they may be expected to serve as a representative for the Black community and the primary point of contact in cases of racism. This role can often retraumatize them by revisiting past experiences of discrimination. Furthermore, working in a more ethnically diverse environment can foster a greater sense of comfort and belonging for Black teachers, offering them a supportive space where their identities are more widely shared and understood.

The curriculum in Austria entails many institutional hurdles and is also criticized for being outdated and not adjusted for the current climate. This includes the racist and derogatory depiction of Africa and Black history from a Western and white perspective and the lack of critical discussion of said portrayal. Africa is seen as an opposite of Europe. Africa labeled as underdeveloped and poor, while Europe is seen as rich and enlightened. These narratives not only shape students' understanding of history but can also have detrimental effects on Black students' self-perception. Additionally, they can reinforce harmful stereotypes among white students, fostering a belief in their own superiority over Black people and Africans. Representation is crucial for Black students' self-esteem, whether it comes in the form of Black characters in books, positive lessons on African and Black history, or the presence of Black teachers.

Moreover, racism and the need for anti-racism workshops are often overlooked as significant issues, contributing to the normalization of racism and the minimization of its impact. This reflects a broader lack of understanding of racism within institutions, among both teachers and students. Black educators, in particular, frequently face higher expectations and greater scrutiny compared to their white colleagues. Additionally, they are often perceived as less competent and capable by parents, reinforcing the narrative that Black teachers are regarded more as assistants than as qualified professionals in their own right.

6.3 Black Organizations

The perspective of Black anti-racism organizations on the matter further demonstrates that racism within the education system is prevalent, be it through the depiction of Africa and Black people in schoolbooks (AEWTASS) or actions of individuals and the institutions (D!SRUPT).

While there are multiple Black anti-racism organizations in Austria, they all serve a different purpose in fighting against institutional and structural racism. AEWTASS observed that improving the depiction of Africans and Africa is not a priority for the Austrian government and her institutions. While they may agree on changing the curriculum for the better during meetings and public discussions, their actions suggest a lack of concern, this is shown by the absence of financial backing. To change negative and degrading narratives of Africa, the organization has to first raise awareness among publishers, which already illustrates the many obstacles they have to overcome.

Not offering mandatory anti-racism workshops for teachers is another problem within the Austrian education system that further facilitates racism. Whether or not a teacher participates in an anti-racism workshop is solely based on the interest and willingness of the individual teacher or the principal. This shows that teachers, who are in need of anti-racism training, might not receive it due to it not being mandatory. Anti-racism workshops are able to aid teaching staff in recognizing racism and acknowledging that it exists and that Black students are susceptible to it.

7. Conclusion

In this thesis, I have explored the manifestations of anti-Black racism within the Austrian education system, through qualitative interviews with students and educators, revealing not only its institutional and structural dimensions but also its deeply personal and emotional implications. The findings resonate profoundly with my own experiences as a Black man within Austrian society and education. What began as isolated incidents, often trivialized as “harmless jokes”, took on a deeper meaning through engagement with the broader African diasporic community. It became evident that these are not one-off or unique experiences, but rather shared realities. What may appear to be personal encounters are, in fact, collectively endured and widely internalized. This shared silence, often rooted in trauma and marginalization, reflects how racism persists as an unspoken but pervasive "open secret" within both schools and society at large, which shapes the realities of Black youths from their early childhood into their adolescence.

Racism is not limited to explicit acts such as racial slurs or physical bullying, the thesis shows, as it is deeply entrenched in institutional practices and subtle interpersonal

interactions that contribute to an environment of exclusion and marginalization. Covert racism – including microaggressions, biased evaluations, and the disproportionate punishment of Black students – is particularly harmful due to its normalized and often invisible nature. These subtle forms of discrimination are frequently carried out by educators, who wield institutional authority, thus reinforcing systemic inequality.

Overt racism remains a significant issue, especially among students, the data further reveals. Many interviewees reported an early exposure to racial slurs, dehumanizing jokes, and exclusionary behavior, which were often tolerated or trivialized by school staff. In some cases, teachers were identified as the perpetrators of overt racism, engaging in acts of humiliation and the use of derogatory language, albeit less frequently than students. Such incidents are rarely met with serious consequences, thereby reinforcing a culture in which racism is normalized, downplayed, or outright ignored.

An alarming pattern that emerged from the interviews, is the isolation experienced by Black students, who are often the only Black individuals in their class or school. This heightened visibility makes them more susceptible to stereotyping, social exclusion, and being “othered”. In such settings, the social expectation to be the representative of a whole demographic along with the pressure to conform increasingly weigh on Black pupils, and thus their capacity to safely express identity or challenge injustice becomes severely limited. The interviews also highlight the emotional toll of these experiences.

Black students reported that attempts to challenge racist behavior or speak up against injustices lead to them being labeled as aggressive, disruptive, or problematic. This dynamic discourages self-advocacy and contributes to internalized racism, as students learn that their concerns will be dismissed or even punished. The fear of retaliation and further marginalization silences many and creates a deeply imbalanced power dynamic within the classroom.

Another striking aspect to consider is the systemic nature of racism perpetuated through curricula and pedagogical practices. The portrayal of Africa within school materials is often reductive, framed through lenses of poverty, backwardness, and conflict, with little to no acknowledgment of the continent’s rich cultural, historical, and intellectual contributions. African history is largely diminished to narratives of slavery and

colonialism, which further entrenches stereotypical perceptions. These narratives are seldom challenged in the classroom, in part because teachers lack training, awareness, or motivation to do so. As a result, Black students must navigate educational environments that not only fail to affirm their identities but actively distort and demean them.

Black teachers corroborate many of these findings and offer further insights into the structural barriers that hinder progress. These educators noted a profound lack of institutional acknowledgment of racism as a systemic issue, pointing to the absence of mandatory anti-racism workshops, inclusive pedagogy, or accountability mechanisms. Their perspectives underscore the urgent need for educational reform and the critical role that teacher training, policy change, and curricular revision must play in dismantling structural racism.

The combined effect of educational institutions and the social environment plays a crucial role in shaping racial attitudes and perceptions. Despite living in a digitally connected world in 2025 – with access to diverse sources of knowledge – stereotypical, outdated, and reductive portrayals of Africa remain dominant within media, public discourse, and most noticeably, within the school curriculum. These portrayals perpetuate a Eurocentric worldview which continues to position Africa as the “other”, characterized primarily by poverty, conflict, and underdevelopment.

Therefore, it must be recognized that it is within kindergartens and classrooms where most racial attitudes are initially formed. If children are taught stereotypical, uncritical, and Eurocentric narratives about Africa, these perceptions inevitably carry over into their adult and professional lives. The current lack of nuance in educational content contributes to the continued marginalization of African peoples and fails to reflect the historical, political, and cultural heritage of the continent. While the inclusion of colonialism and slavery in curricula is necessary, these alone cannot define Africa’s historical identity. Figures such as Mansa Musa, Patrice Lumumba, Kwame Nkrumah, Sékou Touré, and Nelson Mandela, for example, represent complex and empowering narratives that deserve as much attention and critical engagement as their European counterparts.

The education system must respond to the increasing presence and visibility of people of African descent in Austrian society. Even if they constitute a minority, their lived experiences must be acknowledged, respected, and addressed within both the framework of the curriculum and the pedagogical practice. A meaningful re-evaluation of how Africa and Black identities are represented in education is essential, not only for the benefit of Black students, but in order to foster a truly inclusive and tolerant society.

The aforementioned findings clearly indicate that the Austrian education system is failing Black students by allowing racism to persist. Addressing these failures requires more than individual goodwill; it demands a systemic overhaul grounded in anti-racist principles. Schools must become spaces where all students, regardless of racial background, can feel safe, valued, and affirmed. This involves mandatory anti-racism education for all educators, inclusive and decolonized curricula, robust reporting and accountability structures, and a firm commitment to listening to and centering the voices of Black students. Only through these measures can Austria move toward an education system that truly reflects the democratic values of equality, inclusion, and social justice.

A growing body of recent publications (Aydemir et al., 2019; Hasters, 2019; Majonga, 2019; Pitts, 2020; Jovanovic & Alashe, 2022; Rink & Usifo, 2023; Durgun, 2025; Hasrat-Nazimi, 2025; Wullers, 2025), many of which reflect personal experiences, highlights that racism has become an increasingly relevant and discussed topic in German-speaking countries as well. While the murder of George Floyd in 2020 in the United States triggered a global awareness of anti-Black racism, giving the issue a voice (e.g. the Austrian citizens' initiative *Black Voices*, inspired by the Black Lives Matter movement) and recognition within society, the current political shift to the right across the Global North displays that manifestations of racism are intensifying, and societal tolerance continues to decline.

As a Black Austrian, I advocate for a shift in perspective, toward one that respects and listens to the voices of individuals of African descent, takes their societal struggles seriously, and rejects the normalization and trivialization of racism. Engaging with racism should under no circumstances be dismissed as a minor inconvenience or be handled with indifference. It is emotionally draining to continuously and seemingly futilely explain the harms of racism to those who choose not to understand, or who mock and downplay

the lived realities of those affected. Statements like “It’s just a word” exemplify the privilege of those who are shielded from racism’s dehumanizing impact. True progress will only be possible when Austrian society at large chooses to listen, reflect, and act – moving beyond willful ignorance toward collective responsibility.

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8.1 Attachments

8.1.1 Abbreviation

AEWETASS Advancing Education Within the Austrian School System

PoC Person of Color

8.1.2 Translations

Chapter 2.1 Racism

“(…) [Racism is a marking of differences] that enables a group to distinguish itself from and set itself apart from other people. This marking serves as a justification for social, political, or economic actions that, as a consequence, deny certain groups access to material or symbolic resources and thereby create privileges for the excluding group.” (Hall, 2004 in: Behrning et al., 2022, pp. 3 & 4).

Chapter 4.1 Analysis

Interviewer: Would you say that you were alone, or that you were lonely?

Partner: Yes, both.

8.1.3 Interview Guidelines

Interview Orga 1

1. Wie lange gibt es Disrupt?
2. Wie seid ihr auf die Idee gekommen Disrupt zu gründen?
3. Macht ihr das hauptberuflich?
4. Wie wird das Projekt/der Verein finanziert?
5. Wie wird man auf euch aufmerksam? / Wie erfahren die Lehrer von der Existenz der Workshops?
6. Ist die Thematik in eurer Arbeit Anti-schwarze Diskriminierung oder Diskriminierung im Allgemeinen.
 - 6.1. Glaubst du, dass eine Verallgemeinerung der Diskriminierung zu einer Abschwächung der jeweiligen Initiativen führt? (nicht schwarze Diskriminierung, sondern Diskriminierung im Allgemeinen)
7. Was sagt die Bildungsdirektion dazu? Ist es von denen anerkannt/gefördert?
 - 7.1.1. Wie eng arbeitet ihr mit der Bildungsdirektion zusammen?
8. Was sind die Hauptprobleme, die im österreichischen Bildungsbereich zu sehen sind?
 - 8.1. Inwiefern spielt der institutionelle Rassismus eine Rolle?
9. Welches Feedback bekommt ihr?

10. Habt ihr das Gefühl, dass ihr mit eurer Arbeit etwas bewirkt?
 - 10.1.1. Inwiefern?
11. Wie schaut so ein Workshop aus?
 - 11.1.1. Welches Training bekommen die Lehrkräfte?
12. Welche Ausbildung braucht man als Workshopleiterin?
13. Gibt es einen Grund, wieso der Frauenanteil in eurem Verein so hoch ist?
14. (Könnt ihr aus der Tätigkeit einen positiven Nutzen ziehen?)
15. Inwieweit gibt es einen thematischen Schnittpunkt mit anderen Gruppen (ZARA, ADA, Aewtass, Black Voices)?
 - 15.1.1. Unterstützen sich bzw. kooperieren die jeweiligen Gruppen oder ist es hinderlich, dass die verschiedenen Gruppen ein ähnliches Ziel haben?
16. Gibt es eine Bereitschaft anti-schwarzen Rassismus zu bekämpfen?
17. Welche aktuellen Projekte gibt es?
18. Wie sieht die Zukunft aus?

Interview Orga 2

1. How long have you been working for AEWTASS?
 - a. What do you enjoy about working at AEWTASS?
 - b. Are you a founding member?
2. What are some of the problems you notice when it comes to racism and the Austrian education system?
3. How does AEWTASS plan on combating these problems?
4. How do you believe that AEWTASS can change something within the system? How? (for example there was a project about racism in schoolbooks at the Institute of Social and Cultural Anthropology in the 1990s – obviously not successful)
5. How do you believe that you can change something within the system?
6. What kind of training do teachers get to handle racism?
7. What kind of training do teachers need when it comes to racism?
8. What role does the Austrian Bildungsdirektion play?
 - a. How involved/cooperative are they?
 - b. Do they view racism as a problem?
9. What does the Austrian education system lack, when it comes to black people in the education system?

Interview Teacher 1

1. Why did you decide to become a teacher?
2. What's your favorite thing about teaching?
3. How long have you been a teacher in Austria?
4. How many schools have you taught in?
5. Were you the only black teacher?
 - a. What was that feeling like?
6. What's the relationship with your colleagues? Do they accept you?
7. What's the relationship like with the students? Do they accept you?
8. What's the relationship like with the parents? Do they accept you?
9. Do you see yourself as "contact person" for black children? Do you feel pressured

into this role?

10. Do you have the feeling that you have to be stricter with black children compared to white children, due to potential perception of favouritism?

11. Does racism between the kids play a role?

12. Does racism between colleagues play a role?

13. What do you think are the main factors that contribute to racism in schools?

14. What picture is conveyed about Africa in the schoolbooks?

a. Is there room for critical discussions within the classroom?

b. How intensively is the topic Africa and Black history talked about?

15. How does the education system disadvantage black children/students?

Interview Teacher 2

1. Was machst du beruflich?

a. Wo arbeitest du?

b. Wie lange machst du das schon?

c. Wie gefällt es dir?

2. Spielt an deinem Arbeitsplatz Rassismus unter den Kindern eine Rolle?

3. Wie ist es mit Rassismus unter den PädagogInnen?

a. Wie geht es dir damit?

4. Haben Sie irgendwelche Beobachtungen oder Erfahrungen in Bezug auf Rassismus in Ihrer Schule / in Ihrem Kindergarten gemacht?

a. Inwieweit sind Kinder afrikanischer Herkunft davon betroffen?

5. Was sind Ihrer Meinung nach die Hauptfaktoren, die zu Rassismus an Schulen / Kindergärten beitragen?

a. Wie geht es dir damit?

6. Welches Bild übermittelt man über Afrika?

7. Wie gehen Sie mit Fällen von Diskriminierung in Ihrem Klassenzimmer / Ihrer Kindergartengruppe um?

8. Wie nehmen Sie die Behandlung von Kindern afrikanischer Abstammung im Vergleich zu anderen Kindern an Ihrer Schule / Ihrem Kindergarten wahr?

9. Wie benachteiligt das Bildungssystem konkret SchülerInnen / Kinder afrikanischer Herkunft?

10. Sind Sie der Meinung, dass der Lehrplan und die Unterrichtsmaterialien kulturelle Diversität – vor allem in Bezug auf Afrika – angemessen berücksichtigen?

11. Haben Sie eine Schulung bezüglich Diskriminierung und Diversität erhalten?

a. Halten Sie diese Schulungen für besonders effektiv?

12. Wie kann Ihrer Meinung nach das schulische Umfeld verbessert werden, um Schüler / Kinder afrikanischer Abstammung besser zu unterstützen?

13. Welche Rolle spielen die Eltern dabei?

a. Inwiefern gibt es einen Zusammenhang zwischen dem Verhalten der Eltern und dem der Kinder?

14. Welche Rolle sollten Ihrer Meinung nach Pädagogen bei der Bekämpfung von Rassismus in der Gesellschaft generell spielen?

Interview students

1. Was hast du seit deiner Matura gemacht?
2. Wie war der Übergang vom Schulsystem zu dem, was du jetzt machst?
3. Was vermisst du am Meisten aus deiner Schulzeit/Unizeit?
4. Bist du noch im Kontakt mit ehemaligen Mitschülern/Lehrern?
5. In welche Schule bist du gegangen?
6. Wie hat es dir dort gefallen?
7. Warst du dort die einzige Person of Colour in der Schule/Jahrgang/Klasse?
 - a. Wie war das für dich?
8. Wie war die Beziehung zu deinen KlassenkameradInnen/ Uni-kollegen? Vor allem zu denen, die nicht POC waren/sind.
 - a. Gibt/Gab es welche die mit deiner Hautfarbe nicht zurechtgekommen sind?
 - b. Wie ist/war das für dich?
 - c. Gibt/Gab es schon mal unangenehme/rassistische Vorfälle mit KollegInnen/KameradInnen?
9. Wie war das mit den LehrerInnen/ProfessorInnen? Ich gehe davon aus, dass sie Großteils weiß waren?
 - a. Gibt/Gab es welche die mit deiner Hautfarbe nicht zurechtgekommen sind?
 - b. Wie ist/war das für dich?
 - c. Gibt/Gab es da schon mal unangenehme/rassistische Vorfälle mit ProfessorInnen/LehrerInnen?
10. Wie wurde damit umgegangen, als du deine Erfahrungen gemacht hast? Gab es da Unterstützung durch LehrerInnen/SchülerInnen? Wurdest du damit allein gelassen?
11. Wurde Afrika in deiner Bildungslaufbahn jemals thematisiert?
12. Wie wurde Afrika oder sogar schwarze Geschichte in den Schulbüchern dargestellt?
 - a. Hat man sich dann kritisch mit der rassistischen Darstellung auseinandergesetzt, oder wurde das einfach so hingenommen?
 - b. Wie hast du dich dabei gefühlt?
13. Wie glaubst du haben die negativen Erfahrungen deine schulische Leistung beeinflusst?
14. Welche Auswirkung hat die negative Darstellung von Afrika und die Erfahrungen in dem Umfeld auf dein Selbstwertgefühl/Selbstwahrnehmung?

- a. Gab es auch Auswirkungen auf deine psychische Gesundheit?
- 15. Was würdest du dir für Menschen wie dich, die gerade selbst in der Schule sind, oder zur Uni gehen, wünschen?
- 16. Gibt es etwas, was du hinzufügen möchtest?