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Privilege.  
Fighting vocabulary and instrument of knowledge

IU, Inchon, 08.06.2023

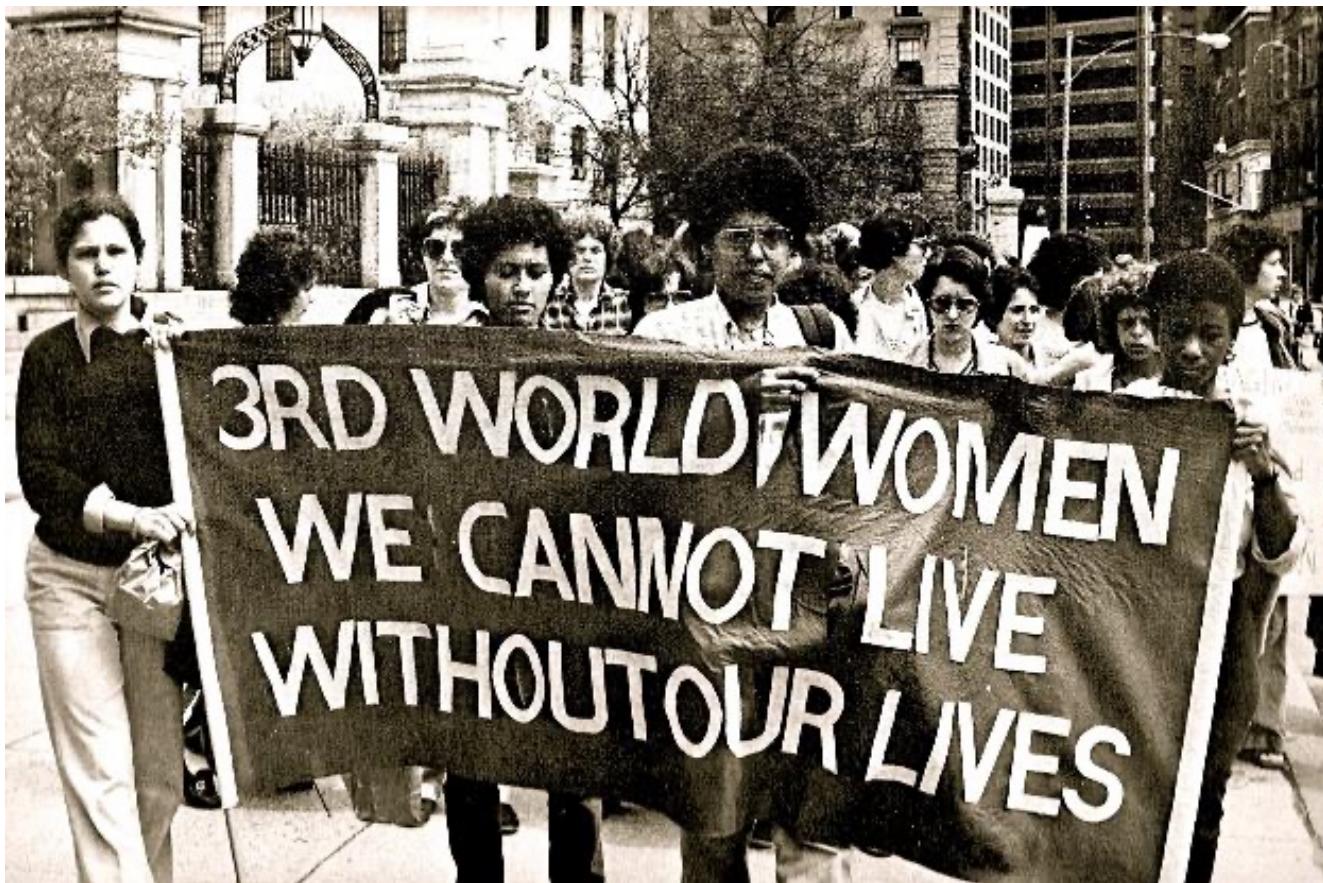


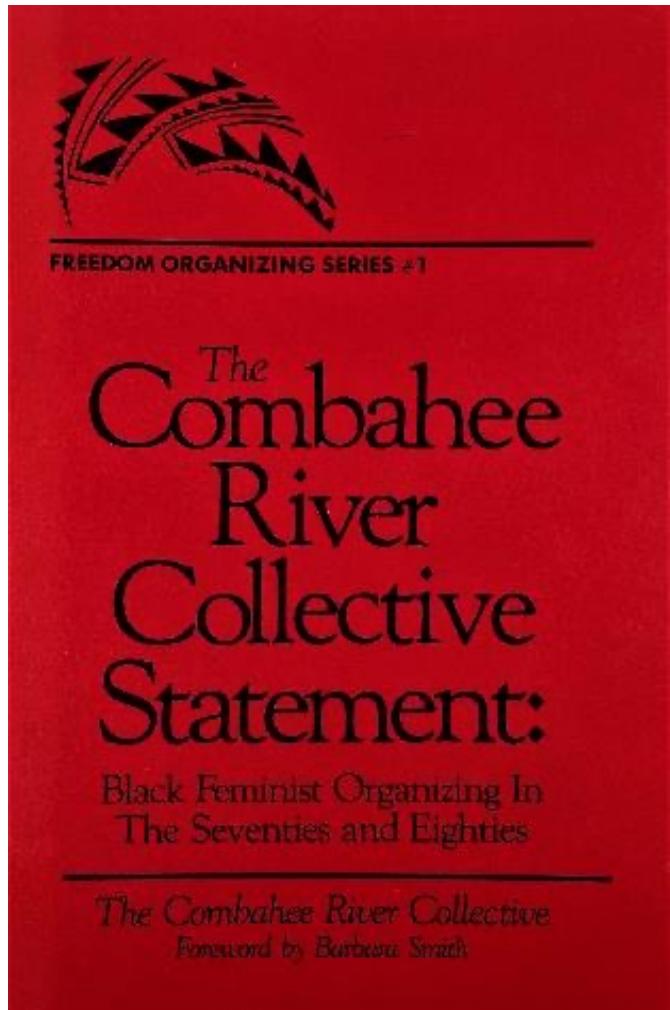
## Outline

1. White and Black Feminism
2. Peculiar Blindness
3. Regime of Normality
4. Emancipatory Identity Politics
5. Admissions of Guilt
6. Arithmetic Games



## Combahee River Collective (1974-1980)







## Black Feminism and White Feminism

"As Black feminists we are made constantly and painfully aware of how little effort white women have made to understand and combat their racism, which requires among other things that they have a more than superficial comprehension of race, colour, and Black history and culture. Eliminating racism in the white women's movement is by definition work for white women to do."

(Combahee River Collective 2018, p. 276).



Peggy McIntosh (\*1934)



Wellesley College  
in Massachusetts



## The White System

"It was and is white people who run the best universities in the country, who sit in all the important key positions. This white system also made me an oppressor, as I had to painfully admit to myself."

(McIntosh, 2020).



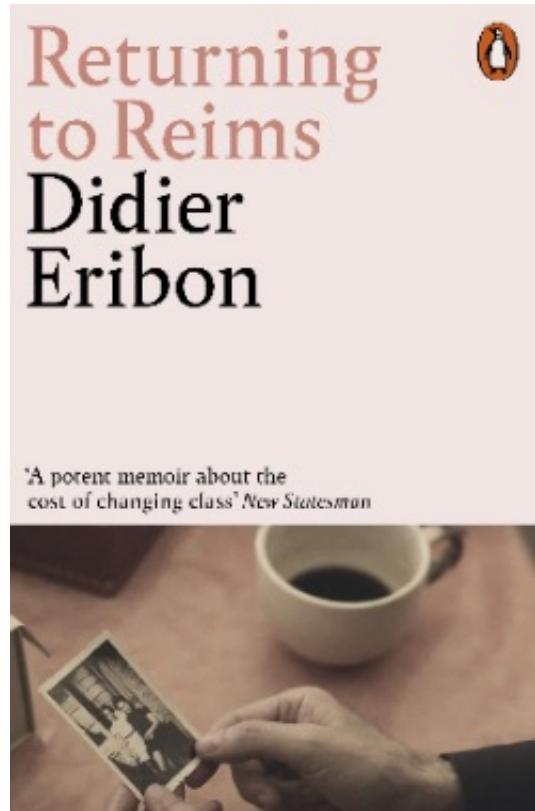
The invisible knapsack – a metaphor for privileges



## A Metaphor for Privileges

"I have come to see white privilege as an invisible package of unearned assets that I can count on and cash in every day, but to which I should be blind. White privilege is like an invisible, weightless backpack with special supplies, insurance, tools, maps, guidebooks, dictionaries, passports, visas, clothes, compass, an emergency kit and blank cheques."

Peggy McIntosh



This must be considered a demanding learning process insofar as the "rulers" do not usually notice "that their world only corresponds to a particular, situated truth", that "a white person is not aware of his whiteness and a heterosexual is not aware of his heterosexuality".



Toni Morrison  
(1931-2019)



Audre Lorde  
(1934-1992)



Angela Davis  
(\*1944)



Tove Ditlevsen  
(1917-1976)



Annie Ernaux  
(\*1940)



Édouard Louis  
(\*1992)



## Esme Choonara und Yuri Prasad on Blindness and Privileges

"At the heart of privilege theory is the idea that oppression works through a series of *unearned advantages* enjoyed by those who do not suffer a particular oppression. So all men, white people or straight people, for example, will gain privileges that come from not facing sexism, racism or homophobia.

The beneficiary of these privileges may be completely unaware of them – in fact much emphasis among privilege theorists is on what they would describe as “making privilege visible” – alerting people to the unearned advantages they may take for granted. Similarly individuals do not choose whether or not to have these “privileges” – they are automatically bestowed by virtue of someone’s race, gender, sexuality and so on."



## German Federal Constitutional Court on Privileges



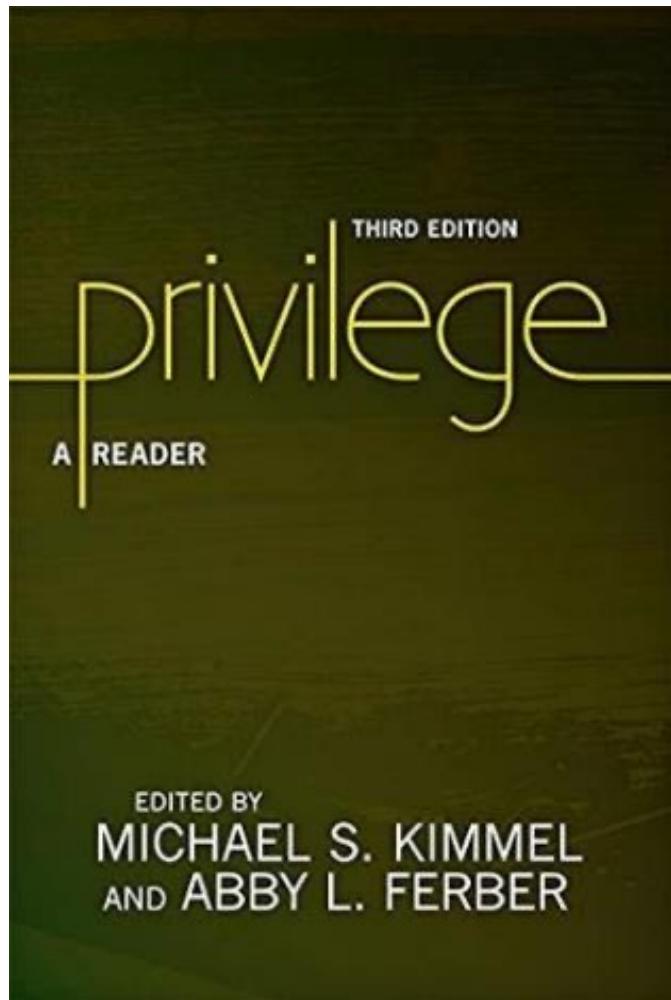
"The democracy of the Basic Law is a democracy that is fundamentally hostile to privileges."



Education is a civil right.  
Plea for an active education policy, 1965



The heirs.  
The students and the culture, 1971



USA/UK, 2008

Markus Rieger-Ladich

### Das Privileg

Kampfvokabel und  
Erkenntnisinstrument

RECLAM<sup>4</sup>  
Denkraum

*»Der Begriff des Privilegs kann der verfahrenen Debatte um emanzipatorische Identitätspolitik eine neue Wendung geben und manche Konfliktlinien entschärfen, vielleicht sogar überwinden«*

Germany, 2022



Among Whites.  
What it means to be privileged. Berlin 2018.



## Wokeness and Awareness

Pointedly formulated, their reproach is: instead of engaging in the redistribution of resources and the energetic dismantling of privileges, instead of working for more equality and justice, for equality and diversity, schools and universities turn out to be a relay station of contemporary power relations.

What is new about this generation of students is that they are very aware of their entanglements in the dominance games and many no longer want to close their eyes to it. They are concerned with clarifying their own participation in practices of exclusion, shaming and discrimination.



## White Saviour Complex



Amjahid uses the example of the "welcome culture" of 2015 to explain the "*paternalism trap of the white saviour complex*" and asks: "Is it even possible to act properly as a white helper? Doesn't the blatant privilege gap between the white person who helps and the non-white person who is helped devalue any aid action from the outset?"



## Limits of moralisation and consciousness-raising

First of all, *moralisation* favours a narrow view of action theory. Individuals then appear to be primarily responsible for social misery. As holders of privileges, they are symbolically in the dock: they lacked the right attitude; their actions were guided by the wrong motives. The way out can only be found in *critical consciousness-raising*. What is overlooked is that *power relations* cannot be overcome through *acts of awareness* alone.

Reflection on personal scope for action is *necessary*, as it is discussion of individual responsibility, but it is *not sufficient*. It must be complemented by the dismantling of institutional discrimination and the critique of those "patterns of thought and representation" (Kerner 2013) that contribute to the stabilisation of ideologies of inequality.



## Esme Choonara und Yuri Prasad on Symptoms and Problems

"This approach confuses *symptoms* with *problems*. Inequalities and prejudices around body size are not factors that exist independently; they are a direct consequence of sexism and concepts of gender. Similarly the vast inequalities in the likelihood of being in prison or of being able to access education are the consequence of racism and social inequality.

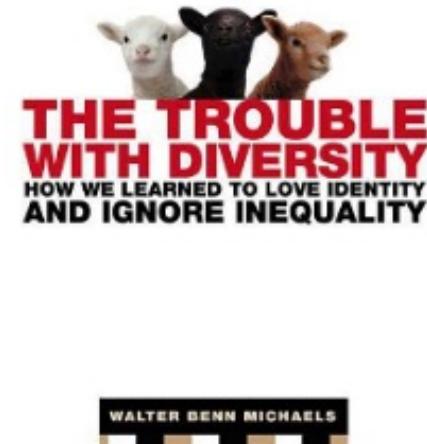
Reeling off a list of "privileges" in this way simply states the existence of an unequal society – *it does not help us to understand it or to challenge it*. In fact the recognition of inequalities becomes an end in itself."



## Walter Benn Michaels on whites with college degrees



"One of the best (and, surely, most provocative) nonfiction books of the year."  
—San Francisco Chronicle



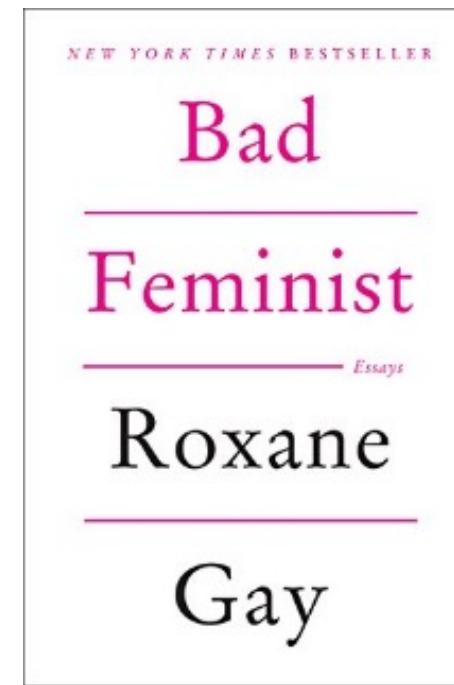
"True, the only thing educated whites with college degrees like better than apologising for their own racism (the technical term is 'checking privilege') is to accuse uneducated whites without college degrees of being racists."



## Checking of Privileges



Then the "checking" of privileges would only be the beginning of a political practice that considers the material as well as the symbolic dimension of social conflicts and in this way counters the danger of marginalised groups being played off against each other. New contributions to debates on privilege are certainly hopeful: there is now increasing talk of "unlearning", "redistributing" and "fighting" privilege.



"You could, however, use that privilege *for the greater good* - to try to level the playing field *for everyone*, to work for social justice, to bring attention to how those without certain privileges are disenfranchised." (Gay 2014: 17)



Thank you for your attention!  
I am very much looking forward to the discussion.