

Hello, my name is Johanna. The reason why I, as a *white* person, am speaking here today, is that I live just above the restaurant with the M-word in its name, located in the "Untere Straße" in Heidelberg. Yesterday the sign above the restaurant was replaced with a new one, with the inscription: M-Word! Absurdly enough, the only words that are not racist "Gasthaus zum" (~restaurant) have been removed, only leaving the racist word, reinforced with an exclamation mark.

This led to a rush meeting, organised by residents of the house together with people that are part of the Antiracism Network in Heidelberg with the aim to draw attention to the fact that this name "change" is not a neutral abstention, but a clear choice for the reproduction of racism, which we cannot accept (in front of our own doorstep). It is irrelevant whether the name was intended as a racial slur or not. Crucially, Black people are and have been attacked and insulted by it for a long time.

In the past, there have already been several attempts to draw attention to and inform about the racist name of the restaurant in the Untere Straße. Obviously, I do not have enough expertise, therefore I will be reading an open letter that experts on the topic and people who are affected have sent to the city a year ago. The letter was published by Decolonize Heidelberg on July 20, 2020:

Trigger warning - this letter uses terms and narratives that reproduce racist stereotypes.

On July 7 of this year, the RNZ reported about two places in Heidelberg that reproduce racist stereotypes: the pub "The M-Word" as well as the life-size figure in the window of "Scheurings Tabakladen" that perpetuate racist and colonial thought patterns. Contrary to what the title suggests, Heidelberg does not have " [an] "M-Word"-Debate", but attention is rather paid to people who openly name the obvious racism that is also deeply inscribed in the history of our city. The question is not just whether the word should be used or not, but rather about whether we accept the underlying racism or not. Heidelberg should take an example from other cities: Because of the racist meaning, Berlin's public transport company has announced that it will rename the subway station "M-Word-Street," as will a pharmacy in Kiel.

Racism already lies in the root of the colonialist-influenced word: On the one hand, the term "M-word" derives from the Greek word *moros* "stupid, foolish, godless, simple-minded" and also from the Latin word *maurus* "black, dark, African". In addition to the already racialized origin of the word, its use is part of a tradition of devaluing and objectifying black¹ people. It is not relevant who exactly is described by this word, but that the enslavement and exploitation of black people worldwide has been legitimized by this foreign attribution.

At "Scheuring's Tobacco Shop," this racist practice is also used for marketing purposes as portrayed by the store's sign as well as through a life-size figure. The figure reproduces colonialist structures that have significantly shaped the racism of today: Non-white people were and are depicted as "exotic" and "lower" people, who were exploited and degraded for the prosperity of European colonial powers and consumption of European societies. In Heidelberg as well, "Völkerschauen" were held - events like "human zoos" - in which about

35,000 Black people were paraded and humiliated like animals all over Germany. They were portrayed as "exotic" and "wild" in order to justify the hierarchization of people and thus also colonialism. And it is precisely this image that the figure in the window of "Scheuring's Tobacco Shop" carries into today's society and the urban space of Heidelberg.

In both cases - the restaurant "M-Word" as well as the visualization of this racist foreign attribution in the form of a life-size figure in "Scheuring's Tobacco Shop" – ultimately it is irrelevant whether this is intended as a racist violation or not. What is important is that black people are attacked and racially insulted by it. The justification for the charge of insult is therefore obvious.

We are not trying to condemn individual people, but we want to draw attention to racist structures in order to dismantle them together, so that the racism that Black people experience in our city can be taken seriously. Racism cannot be fully understood by white people, because the centuries-long history of elevating white people over non-white people cannot be reversed. We therefore appeal to all people connected to this issue to listen to the expertise of people working in the field of anti-racism and people experiencing racism.

Specifically, we demand that the M-Word name of the restaurant is changed and that the letters on the building are removed. We also demand the removal of the racist figure and sign of "Tabak Scheuring". We call the Mayor of the City, as well as the members of the city council to recognize the dehumanization and exploitation of Black people and to stand up against a continuation of these foreign images in the urban space of Heidelberg. We demand that the colonial history of Heidelberg is dealt with by official bodies. We would like to see a city that takes its citizens' experiences of racism seriously and that does not focus on a discussion about the intentions of individual actors as the center of the debate. The focus is the question whether we want to reproduce racism or not. The fact that it exists should have been recognized in our society long ago.

The city has a responsibility to protect all its citizens, especially those who experience discrimination and exclusion in the urban space in Heidelberg. This debate is not theoretical and it is not about the politically correct choice of words. It is about the responsibility of our city to protect the human dignity of all its citizens, no matter what skin color or origin is attributed to them.

As described in the letter, this battle is not only fought in Heidelberg. The district council in Berlin justified the renaming of the Subway station as follows: "According to today's understanding of democracy, the existing racist core of the name is incriminating and harms Berlin's national and international reputation".

Why is this so difficult in Heidelberg?

The city of Heidelberg has deficits not only in climate protection, but also in racism, because the restaurant clearly demonstrates a racist cityscape and has done so for years by hiding behind white interpretive sovereignty and its tradition. It's time to change this together, to stand

up and fight against racism. This starts with oneself and continues with active anti-racist action. The city of Heidelberg must finally act as it presents itself. This applies to the climate plans as well as to the supposedly anti-racist city image, which cannot be maintained with a restaurant with such a name.