

Women of Colour Resist: *Exploring Women of Colour's Activism in Europe*

Executive Summary, December 2021 - Akwugo Emejulu and Leah Bassel

Introduction

Women of Colour Resist is a cross-national comparative research project that examines how women of colour activists in the Belgium, Denmark, France, Germany, Spain and the United Kingdom strategise, organise and mobilise against austerity, against the far right and for migrants' rights. The six countries in our study are currently experiencing some form of destabilisation due to a combination of austerity, a backlash to migration and illiberal politics. Our project attempts to make visible women of colour's activist labour. Working with six research assistants who conducted the fieldwork, we undertook 167 interviews and focus groups and analysed activists' social media activity from May 2019 to January 2020.

Key findings

- Many of the activists who took part in this project came to political maturation by learning how to articulate and name the racism they experience. This is very important because, particularly in the continental European context, the dynamics of race and racism are oftentimes silenced and denied and there is not an agreed public lexicon on identifying, describing and combating racism—unlike sexism and homophobia.
- The Black Lives Matter movement, rather than being an 'illegitimate' importation of North American race politics to Europe, is a space of mutual exchange, peer learning and dialogue between Black activists across the globe in which ideas, strategies and tactics are shared.
- A cross-cutting concern across all our research sites was activists trying—sometimes succeeding, sometimes failing—to build and maintain solidarity across different groups. The challenge of solidarity, trying to define what it is and how to enact and sustain it, was a preoccupation for many of the activists in this study. What is important to note is that solidarity work was a challenge not only in the multi-racial, multi-ethnic and multi-class coalitions that our activists worked in but also within their niche anti-racist, feminist and anti-fascist networks.
- The long-standing problem of many radical left-wing activists resisting, denying and erasing anti-racist and intersectional analyses persists and remains a major obstacle to any solidarity work with women of colour. However, even in the spaces built by women of colour, some groups were still marginalised, which demonstrates the complex nature of solidarity work.
- Activist work on pleasure, joy and celebration is radical politics as these activities are an essential part of sustaining oftentimes demoralising and dangerous activism over the long term.
- Seemingly every new generation of activists must discover the history of women of colour's activism in Europe for themselves. Supporting archival work which documents, collects and preserves the histories of women of colour's activism will enable the memory work that is so crucial to any kind of present and future activism.