

The cover features several semi-circular shapes in dark grey and orange. At the top, there are two dark grey semi-circles. The title is centered in orange and black. Below the title, there are two orange semi-circles on the left, a dark grey semi-circle in the center, and another dark grey semi-circle on the right. At the bottom, there are two orange semi-circles stacked vertically in the center, a dark grey semi-circle on the left, and another dark grey semi-circle on the right.

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

Akwugo Emejulu and Leah Bassel

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

Executive Summary

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.

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

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Introduction

Women of Colour Resist is a cross-national comparative research project that examines how women of colour activists in the United Kingdom, Germany, France, Belgium, Denmark and Spain strategise, organise and mobilise at the grassroots to advance their interests. In particular, this project explores how women of colour activists struggle against the inter-related issues of:

1. The unprecedented reductions to social welfare spending and the privatisations of social welfare states across Europe
2. The political, policy and public opinion backlash against migrants in relation to increased surveillance, detentions and deportations
3. The rise of illiberal politics in terms of the electoral gains of far right parties, the mainstreaming of extremist language in political discourse and the spike in racist and xenophobic hate crimes.

By 'women of colour', we refer to women who experience the effects of processes of racialisation, class and gender domination as well as other sources of inequality, particularly hierarchies of legal status (Bassel and Emejulu 2017). Working with six research assistants who conducted the fieldwork, we undertook 167 interviews and focus groups from May 2019 to January 2020.

Context for the Project

The European Union is facing a double crisis of austerity and migration—with women of colour at the forefront of grassroots activism on these issues. As a response to the 2008 economic crisis, austerity measures—deficit reductions through tax increases and cuts to public spending—have been pursued by local, national and supranational states with disastrous results, particularly for women of colour (Theodoropoulou and Watt 2011; Women's Budget Group 2018). Before the crisis, women of colour were already in long-term precarious social and economic circumstances. Due to the asymmetrical impacts of austerity on the poorest households, women of colour are disproportionately disadvantaged by these unprecedented cuts to public spending which sharpen and deepen their already existing social and economic inequalities (Bassel and Emejulu 2017).

The migration crisis, which was an 'invisible' crisis of human trafficking and perilous Mediterranean crossings since 2010, came to widespread public attention in summer 2015 and has challenged the principles of European solidarity (Crawley and Skleparis 2018; Ataç, Rygiel et al. 2021). Women of colour activists—many of whom are migrants themselves—have been organising and mobilising not just for temporary emergency relief for migrants but challenging and expanding our ideas of social citizenship, inclusion and belonging (Erel 2011; Bassel and Khan, 2021).

Economic insecurity has combined with fears about migration to generate destabilising, illiberal politics. These politics fuel popular support (and in some cases, significant electoral gains) for populist right-wing groups and political parties (Emejulu and Van der Scheer 2021). This rise of the far right has in turned sparked a crisis for both centre-left and centre-right mainline political parties whose identities, aims and electoral fortunes have been transformed during this unpredictable moment of change. Indeed, the shock of Alternative for Deutschland briefly becoming the third largest party in the Bundestag in Germany after the 2017 federal elections, but the defeat of Geert Wilders' Party for

Freedom through the cooptation of his xenophobic rhetoric by mainstream parties in the 2020 Dutch elections, demonstrate the instability of the current politics and the challenges faced by activists. The ways in which the British public and political parties—on both the left and the right—have been split by the raucous Brexit vote underscore this moment of fracture and instability. Given this uncertain political and economic moment, what is the fate of women of colour activists working for equality and social justice?

Women of colour, often operating in hostile contexts, are organising and mobilising in innovative ways to advance their political claims-making to the state and other citizens based on their race, class, gender, sexuality and legal status. We recognise that, as a term, 'women of colour', does not translate well across Europe. However, we have found no better moniker for naming the shared experiences of racialised women across the continent. Further, we understand that there is debate about who is included in the category of 'women' and for this project we included cis and trans women and non-binary people as research participants. When sharing quotes from activists in this report we use the terms they used to describe themselves, which have been anonymised as needed.

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 and map the processes by which they organise, mobilise and build coalitions to advance their interests.



Methodology

The project fieldwork took place across six sites: Germany (Berlin), France (Paris), Belgium (Brussels—Francophone and Flemish communities), Denmark (Copenhagen), Spain (Madrid) and the United Kingdom (London). We have selected these cities, where most of the research was undertaken, because of our knowledge of their dense and varied networks of women of colour activists working creatively on anti-austerity and migrants' rights. For example, Paris is the base for several important Afrofeminist groups such as Mwasi Collectif. Berlin is the home of high profile anti-austerity and racial justice groups such as Black Lives Matter Berlin. London is where the anti-austerity feminist group, Sisters Uncut, is concentrated.

We recruited six research assistants who are fluent in both English and the local language(s) to undertake the following fieldwork in each country:

6 case studies—1 in each city—of women of colour's grassroots movements for migrants' rights, anti-austerity and combating the far right. Each case study comprises:

- Participant observation of campaign meetings, demonstrations and lobbying efforts
- 1-2 focus groups with activist women
- 3-4 semi-structured interviews with formal (those with a named position within the campaign: spokesperson, organiser, etc) and informal (those without a position but are important influencers and connectors) leaders of these groups
- 6-8 semi-structured interviews with activists
- Analysis of activist texts (flyers and webpages) and social media (Facebook, Instagram and Twitter)

The use of four different methods—participant observation, interviews, focus groups and textual analysis—allowed us to capture the problems and possibilities of women of colour's activism and affords the opportunity for comparison across six different national contexts and mapping networks within and across contexts.

Section 1: Becoming activists

In our fieldwork, we wanted to understand the forces shaping activists' lives and work. One of the best ways of understanding why women of colour's activism looks the way it does is by exploring how activists become politicised and their motivations for taking action in public space. These experiences are not identical in each context but they share a moment of awakening from a wider European context that is persistently silent on race and racism, which is always understood to be a problem that exists elsewhere, particularly the United States.

Across all six contexts we found that for the majority of activists, they came to their work through their harrowing experiences of systemic racism, sexism and/or homophobia/transphobia in their everyday lives. Indeed, this should not come as a surprise: many women of colour activists are shaped by wanting to make sense of their lived experiences. However, more than that, many activists, in the process of being politicised, found that they did not have the language and vocabulary to adequately describe their unequal experiences.

Thus, 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. Being able to articulate the racism and exclusion they experience can be a revelatory moment for many activists. As this mixed race Afro-European activist in Berlin discusses:

Well, I wasn't actually politicised in Germany. So, even though I was born and grew up here...I had a certain idea of society—like many people with whom I talk have now, where I don't even understand why they have it... So, I used to have that too, like, I thought: "Okay. I might be, like, Black and in Germany, but what I'm experiencing isn't real racism as long as no one is hurting me physically." So. That's what I always thought. I always thought that if I don't get beaten up or someone somehow threatens me with a weapon, then all the hostility I get, it's not racism.

The connection between what Black Lives Matter means in the USA, what it means in the UK or what this term itself means [in Germany], how it was created by the initiators, just totally clicked for me, somehow. I just thought it was a cool idea to say: We'll try to use it...Black Lives Matter...isn't a battle cry or something, but a declaration of love...And that's just what I thought....just such an empowering thing, in, like, three words, to introduce it like that and somehow a demand...but at the same time, like, an explanation—it's all in there for me.

In particular, the ways in which the politics of Black Lives Matter circulated – well before the summer of 2020 uprisings – among Black activists across Europe and the United States and the ways in which activists learned from each other through transcontinental connections, served as an important moment of political awakening and inspiration for many of the activists in this study. As this Black trans activist in Belgium notes: 'Black Lives Matter really inspires me. [Through] Black Lives Matter, we learn the language [of anti-racism], we learn...unapologetic Blackness.'

We see this same sentiment repeated across our research sites: activists feeling alienated because they are robbed of the language to adequately describe the racism and sexism they encounter. They come to activism as a way to make sense of their

experiences and then are affirmed and transformed as activists. In terms of the process of developing a political analysis about racism and the importance of transcontinental connections, we see similar dynamics at play with this Asian-Danish activist in Copenhagen:

I think I was born into some kind of very strong idea of you have to, as a single person, stand up for what you think is right. And then when I grew older and became a teenager, I sought out what you would call the most radical activists, like, Greenpeace and such, but I never felt quite at home in these areas...So I am very much trained in an activist thinking. But I would say that my activism was, until I was around 30, very white, or very, I played very much into the white idea of what is activism...And I didn't think I got a hint of the platform where I am now, before 1997 when I went to the States and studied a year in New York. And there I met for the first time the strong, local Black movement...and also I met Asian, I wouldn't call them activists, but more like creative people that kind of brought me into, or made me understand, what I was, a person of colour basically. So when I came home I started to talk about that for the first time...because for me it was an awakening of who I was.

Learning to see and understand the particular dynamics of inequality in their respective countries is a watershed moment of politicisation and helps at least partially explain how and why activists undertake particular kinds of work. Linking individual and collective experiences of intersecting inequalities, particularly in relation to the state, is the driver for this Black activist's work in London:

Like Black women and our families, those are the experiences of the state that we are having and so it is not an ability to see some future dystopia, it's that it's happening right now and that's why we know that that's what the state is up to because it's obvious. Even if they are not your experiences small things are told to you...We know that people often don't have a Black feminist analysis of their situation even if they are Black women, but the question comes to mind of how can that not be your analysis of the state when that is your experience of the state?

Activism is then reshaped through the leadership of those who are directly affected within intersecting struggles. Working at the intersections is non-negotiable for this 'metis/mixed race woman's experiences in France. 'It is impossible to do otherwise. Because everything is connected...you have to be aware that it is holistic work. In contrast to white feminists, we don't want to become CEOs. We want to eliminate CEOs'

Across borders, Afrofeminist collectives have been important spaces for many continental European Black women to collectively learn, organise and mobilise for their interests. These collectives are concentrated in Francophone Europe, but work across different countries and languages. They speak back to the European silence on Black feminism, Afrofeminism and the dominance of Black American feminism. Afrofeminism insists on conversations across Europe, the Caribbean and Africa. It grounds analysis and action in the particular and specific histories of colonialism and constructions of race and gender in the various European nation-states in which Black women live (Othieno and Davis on behalf of Mwasi Collectif 2019). We explore these initiatives in greater detail below.

We will now move on to provide a snapshot of what activism looks like in each of our research sites.

Section 2: Overview of key challenges of activist organising

We were deeply impressed and humbled by the hard work activists undertook to organise for their interests, build community and care for each other in this time of crisis and political upheaval. In this section we consider two key challenges of activist organising that cut across different issues: the challenges of solidarity work, the challenges of community building and the importance of separatist spaces.

Challenges of solidarity work

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 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. There is a long-documented history of racism, sexism and homophobia in left-wing activist spaces (Bassel and Emejulu 2017; Emejulu and van der Scheer 2021; Delphy 2015; Carby 1982; Optiz, Oguntoye and Schultz 1991). The activists in our study identified this as a real obstacle in building solidarity to unite with fellow activists to take action on the issues that are important to them. For instance, this mixed race migrants' rights activist in Madrid discusses the problem of solidarity on the Spanish left like this:

We are in Spain right now at a turning point. We're moving very slowly. We are starting to talk about race. And very slowly there is an interest in hearing other voices and other opinions and other theories. But there has been like zero real solidarity, all the solidarity, because what I've seen here, is that white feminists or white people in general see anti-racism as an opportunity for personal growth or personal enrichment through knowledge, but not actually the liberation of people of colour. So I don't think that we can talk about solidarity on these terms.

For this activist, she is witnessing a change in attitude amongst some of her fellow activists but the problem she identifies is not necessarily a willingness to listen but rather treating racism as an individualised, temporary concern rather than a system of institutionalised violence and exclusion. In Paris, this French Maghrebi feminist activist finds the same exhausting dynamics still at play in left-wing activist spaces:

I learned a lot of things about the left and its limits. I learned a lot of things about the profound lack of humility of the radical left in France. And of the tropes they still have, that it is upper middle class white men who think they are going to save everyone else!

Similarly, in Belgium, this queer migrants' rights activist found a dynamic of racism within LGBTQI+ activist spaces:

There is still racism within the LGBTQI community, and it's ridiculous for me: how can you be in an oppressed community and be an oppressor yourself? So, it strikes me that [solidarity] is very difficult. Unless people are trying to hook up [have a relationship] with Black people, that's when

they'll pretend to be allies. But other than that, it's very difficult to be [in solidarity]...The trust is really broken, you know. Because [we are thinking]: "Are you really an ally?"

This resistance to anti-racism in left-wing activist spaces in Europe has led to some soul searching amongst some women of colour activists about how and whether to work with white activists. In London, this gender non-conforming Black activist notes the reasons for their shift away from white-dominated activism, particularly initiatives which often speak for, rather than with, migrants. Instead, for them, the most important work is to be done away from these 'allies', particularly focusing on spaces such as places of worship where they can speak to people in their family and community and address different views of migration, migrants' rights and build solidarity:

And like a lot of the reasons for me moving away from...white-centred lefty spaces is because I'm like who the fuck is going to the churches, who is going to have the arguments with someone...who spends most of her time at church and that is where she finds community...I just feel like that is where the work needs to be done...it makes no fucking sense for me to be over here organising with these white middle-class lefties who will never be able to speak to [a family member] or be able to go into those churches and that is where my position is most fucking crucial.

Facts and evidence do not seem to persuade, and this Afrofeminist activist in France describes the exhaustion and futility of trying to 'prove' the existence of racism to white comrades:

In fact, in the very beginning I thought I could change everyone's mind, that through debating, you can change everyone's mind. And above all I learned that in fact, that there are people [who] you can't [convince]!...In fact, you can speak to them for hours and hours, you can show them studies, you can show them statistics, you can share personal experiences, and nothing works! But I find that what I've learned about people is that experience...well, the fact of debating with people to change their minds, I find it is much more [effective] with Black women like me [who have similar experiences], than with white people...So as things have progressed, I mainly concentrated my energy on my community.

Challenges of community-building and the importance of separatist organising

Activists in Denmark and Germany demonstrated the feasibility and importance of separatist organising in closed, women of colour-only spaces. As this Somali-Danish migrants' rights activist notes, these closed spaces function as refuges to exist outside the white gaze and as a space of being validated and affirmed:

I think it is necessary to have...our own spaces, because I do think people need, it's like you need to be able to be in a place that, where you can feel, that you know you're heard, you're validated and people are like you are, in sync with other people, there is no need to explain, because

it is, in society, it is pretty difficult to be a person of colour in a white majority society, because you are always, it is just so exhausting in general! So I think it is necessary for us to have our own spaces...[to] rest, a place where we can just take a break from...always trying to manage white people's feelings. But I also think it's important, because when your ideas are validated and the work you do is validated it's much harder for like white people to shoot you down. So when you enter mainstream spaces...you are not doubting the things you are saying and the things you are doing, because you've been validated somewhere else...Because many times when you are in like, white majority spaces and you are like the lone voice, it's easy to be like; 'okay everybody is just disagreeing with me, they are clearly [right]' But just to be able to have our own spaces and to know like; 'No, no, this is actually not a completely crazy idea.'

These dynamics play out across the political left, including ostensibly radical white queer spaces, described as 'fatiguing' by this Black trans activist in London:

So that's why I divested, because I was coming with ideas...and like once they feel you with your...Black skin...coming for a leadership role, suddenly they're throwing obstacles in the way...I mean, you know, and like they just freeze you out. And I don't think they know they're doing it. They don't know that that's what they're feeling, is this Black fear like, oh. Oh, here she comes. Oh, it's a lot, it's oh, here we go. Is she related to Malcolm X?...Once I feel that white fragility and I know that they're not reading, doing anything, going to therapy, talking about it, I'm just like, all right, you do you. I don't need to be here.

However, working in so-called separatist spaces does not necessarily resolve the problems of solidarity. Sometimes, working in separatist spaces fractures activists further and it can be difficult to build a collective identity to work on shared interests. For instance, this Afro-German anti-racist activist in Berlin notes the problem of developing a shared Black identity and understanding the different experiences of Blackness that might lead to community-building:

Everybody always talks about community. Community this, community that. But I don't think there is any kind of community in Germany. I mean no Black community. There's, like, a Nigerian community, there's an Eritrean community, there's an Ethiopian community or a Ghanaian community maybe. They're arranged according to their languages and nationalities. But they don't necessarily only identify themselves on behalf of their Blackness or kind of think about what racism does to all people who...look that way.

This Black migrants' rights activist, also living in Berlin, concurs and adds a further layer of complication around building solidarity in Black and people of colour spaces—that of internal hierarchies and exclusions that go unaddressed by fellow activists:

I think that there are taboos which now exist in the community around marginalisation inside the community. So: colourism in the Black community, anti-Blackness in the PoC [People of Colour] community,

Islamophobia in the PoC and also in the Black community which has been socialised Christian. There is lip service being paid to working on that, but I feel that the Black and PoC communities are heavily concentrated on their own marginalisation and refuse to take responsibility for the way in which they are marginalising people inside those communities. So, I think there is a lot of power-claiming and there is a lot of silencing around these topics. I have been trying to work on colourism for a long time and it is clear from the main organisations which are politically active that there is no desire to approach this at all.

Similarly, this Black queer trans activist in Brussels questioned the dynamics at work in activism with straight Black and people of colour activists:

Even Black straight activists don't have an understanding of how difficult it is for queer PoC and queer Black people to like, have spaces where they can just talk to one another, strategise like, and sort of like talk about the fact that not only are we being discriminated [against] for being queer, but also for being Black and poor, for example. You know what I mean? Like...I don't know, there's just, it's... Ah! I literally think that given the sort of, the intersections with which I exist, the mere fact that I remain alive is activism.

Organisational structure played an important role in addressing or failing to address these challenges (Freeman 1970). In London, this woman of colour activist voiced a common ambivalence toward organising that aspires to be horizontal:

I really, really don't trust when people talk about horizontal power structures because I've always found that that ends up entrenching informal power structures and makes it harder to challenge them because people won't accept that they are there.

The activist milieu is extremely complicated with activists seeking to advance their interests whilst simultaneously attempting to navigate exclusions and marginalisations that exist within and between different kinds of activist networks. This hampers their efforts of community-building and solidarity work but it is important to note that these dynamics do not paralyse activists. They still carry on with their work whilst also trying to make sense of these connections and dislocations among different groups.

Section 3: A snapshot of activism in six countries

In terms of activists' work at the grassroots, it is varied and deep. It ranges from radical art collectives to welfare rights advocacy to trade union organising to LGBTQI+ rights work and anti-fascist resistance. We do not think we can or should try to develop a definitive list of activists' work. We propose the recommendations of this report as a starting point to develop a method that philanthropies can use to look for activists in a variety of spaces and places and to be willing to support a wide range of work that the activists themselves deem valuable.

To give a sense of the breadth of the work that activists are undertaking, we will offer a snapshot of the kinds of work taking place in each research site. Our foregrounding of work here is not definitive and should not be taken as such. We continue to explore this activism in greater detail in our ongoing academic work (see for example Emejulu and Bassel 2020). Here we are highlighting work which we think captures the different modes and registers in which women of colour activists are currently working. Research assistants involved in the project had strong connections to specific activist milieu and focused on areas they knew were of particular importance in these communities.

Spain

Our research assistant in Spain, Nadia Nadesan, made the strategic decision to mostly explore queer and trans activism in Madrid and we think this highlights some important dynamics in terms of cis and trans women's and non-binary femmes' public politics which are not often studied: pleasure and joy, defraying the high costs of activist labour through activities that promote happiness.

In this fieldwork, Nadesan mapped creative resistance strategies linked directly to the visual arts, mutual aid and the politics of joy. As one queer Latin American migrants' rights activist explained, activism was about care and community-building for survival, especially around their participation in Critical Pride and how they built a free space in that festival:

Migrant women, the racialised, queers, many people with political asylum or exile status that's my tribe even though the lady at social services tells me you need to get together with more white people...We really communicate when we get together to eat or we get together to take care of ourselves...When we did Critical Pride I felt super proud, we turned to drag to not only imagine binary drag girls or boys, but because many of our deities or identities we sometimes incorporate are other beings, or you can be our ancestors, or nature...I [am] super proud of this space of freedom.

A trans Afro-Spanish woman was even more explicit about the meaning and purpose of focusing on the politics of care, pleasure and joy—it is a kind of reparative act for those queer and trans migrants who are discarded and disrespected by Spanish society:

In Madrid I connected with transgender migrants, a group that at that time already had 8 years with trans people and sexual dissidents making this crossing between sexual dissidence and migration, refuge and asylum. With them I began to link up in order to create spaces, not mixed ones...so that the spaces for meeting would not be with white people,

so that the spaces for partying and enjoyment would not be with white people, and so that the resources would be distributed to non-white people. As the Spanish state's responsibility to compensate, I believe that this is a demand of activism that is very important to me, like the reparation and the historical responsibility in the present that the white institution and institutions have to redistribute and return everything that was taken from us, which will never be repaired, but this will always be present. A Black Brazilian friend always says the unpayable debt... The defence of spaces for sexual dissidents, also the defence of the collective pleasure, of the enjoyment, of the leisure that is denied to us migrants and more to queers, trans, sexual dissidents... We created this group for voguing, to dance, there is the activism. To feel that we are beautiful, to feel that we are desired, to feel that we are together in a family... to get together to go out and march too, but also to cry to see a movie knowing that we are always there.

Germany

By contrast, in Germany, our research assistant, Dr. Dominique Haensell, decided to explore activists engaging in a broader range of work from racial justice organising, to LGBTQI+ rights to supporting migrant women to defending workers' rights. What was striking to us was how all the activists had to reckon with rising tide of far right activity in their communities and how that shaped their decision-making in their work.

For this Black anti-racist activist, she discussed her work in classic terms of community-building and seeking to create and sustain bonds between different kinds of women of colour:

I have always described myself as a community worker or as a community organiser, because in the main my work is not to try to influence policy makers or to influence people outside the community, or the mainstream. My work has always been to increase the level of skill inside the community and to support the relationships inside the community. So, it's much more community-building kind of activity. I see myself as somebody whose focus is inwards, rather than outwards... I often think that the way to repair the relationships inside the community. So that people are more ready to take responsibility, you know, to become accountable to each other. And also, to be honest in their communication, while being true to their own personal values. So, in order to do this, I really have to focus on the community and not on the political goals of organisations which are aimed at changing the behaviour of actors outside.

Alongside this inward-looking work of community repair and accountability we also find activists working on welfare and workers' rights issues such as this Afro-Deutsch anti-austerity activist working to improve the working conditions of cleaners and children's learning conditions in Berlin's schools:

The cleaning staff...are employed by external companies and the aim of the citizens' petition is that the contracts come back to the municipalities. So, this is called re-municipalisation and with it automatically - this is our wish - the working conditions are improved

because due to the wage dumping of the private companies, there is an immense work pressure and exploitation of cleaning staffs. And, just as an example, a cleaner has 2 minutes per classroom. Yes. And they have to work a lot of overtime hours, which are not paid, and sometimes even the teachers clean with the kids, Fridays during the last lesson. This is the case at many Berlin schools...I decided to do this because first of all I want to improve the learning conditions and also the working conditions of the cleaning staff and I see it as a really worthwhile goal. And I think doing something about exploitation and bad learning conditions is a goal that I definitely want to defend.

I've definitely said that it is important to me that we are not just an initiative that talks about people from above, but that we also have to involve those affected. And it was important to me to know beforehand: Is it also in their [the cleaners'] interest? Are we conducting a fight that might get them into trouble or that might push them into a corner where they don't feel comfortable at all? And I was then assured by many that it was in their interest and that it was received positively...I think solidarity is best built in such a way that everyone has equal rights. And that solidarity is lived in the same way, that people are involved who do not have the privilege of volunteering. And perhaps there will never be a cleaner at our meetings, but that is okay if we know that they let us know that what we are doing is good and that we are doing it in their name.

Denmark

Similar to the German context, our research assistant Mette Toft Nielsen, examined a broad range of activist work from anti-fascist organising to creative resistance via the arts to youth work with young people of colour to migrants' rights work in Denmark. It is important to understand that all of this work was in the context of an uptick of far right activity and violence in the run up to the Danish elections in June 2019.

This Afro-Danish migrants' rights activist works to provide material support to and raise awareness of the cruel and unusual treatment of asylum seekers in the country:

[The activist's organisation] was started in 2016, some five months after I went in with a humanitarian group to a high-security, rejected asylum-seeker prison...It was a prison, but they like to call it a deportation camp. Again we are talking about hiding the truths; you change the name, to manipulate. So I refuse this centre's name. I refuse ever to use this centre's name. It is not a centre or a deportation facility. It is a prison! But everything that is in a normal Danish prison it was not there. In a Danish prison there are [musical] instruments, there are libraries, there is gym, there is a kitchen where you can cook your food. Everything was taken out! And you generally go out, you have a job during the day, when you are in the prison in Denmark, but here you were in your cell 23 hours a day and you only came out one hour...[In 2016] Trump had come in...and people invited me and said; 'come and speak' because the Danes they want to sit there and hear about how terrible those Americans are. We can all sit there and say; 'Nasty! Really nasty! How could you!? Because we are not like this in Denmark.' And when I said, 'oh by the way...I will tell you, [migrants] are in prison', a whole list truth telling of what is happening in this country, and 'you, this is a democratic country, this is

your responsibility. You, me, everybody, we need to stop that! We need to start speaking up about it.' And that was not as juicy as the 'we hate Trump'.

For this Asian-Danish activist, she works with a range of activists and artists of colour to build spaces of support for a new kind of political culture and crucially, memory, so that the history and lessons of women of colour activism in Denmark are archived and passed down through the generations:

I am trying to create this activist space for small BIPOC centering groups that don't have access to institutional structures and institutional funding and so on. We are trying to build this activist space...in the heart of Nørrebro, which is like traditionally working class, migrant community, and like, due to the gentrification, the demography of the area obviously changed a lot, so we've talked a lot about, how so many groups lack spaces and maybe also lack ways to sustain the activism that they do, instead of like work, work, work, work, work and then burn out, we could maybe try to nurture a culture, where we could [develop] a generation [of activists] that is more intergenerational, trying to like pass on different kind of knowledge and experience to each other and that's what we try to like sustain with this kind of activist space that we are building.

I think it is a very important conversation to have about like what kind of political culture do we want to nurture within our political group. It is not only to think about the objective or the goal, but really talk a lot about, how do we want to be together, how do we want to work together and like, [how] do we prioritise, for instance, [taking] care of each other rather than [reaching] this deadline and really like emphasise and nurture that we want a political culture, where we look out for each other and also where we are able to criticise each other for what we think that people can do better, maybe in a different kind of way than this like, very hard lined call-out culture.

United Kingdom

In London, our research assistant Imani Robinson worked with a wide range of activists to explore campaigns for migrants rights/no borders, climate justice, police and prison abolition, health and healing, decolonising public spaces, anti-gentrification and LGBTQI+ rights.

For instance, this woman of colour activist prioritises creating space for safety and alternative forms of expression in the struggle against gentrification:

Gentrification is so violent when you're living under it and exposed to it all the time, that there's no safe space to actually be because you're being crushed out of your own body. That's what it feels like and your home which is your body. And so there was no safe space to be and then of course there was no safe space to strategise because you couldn't even be in yourself...[We had a] programme that was exclusively only for people who were experiencing gentrification, it was a very

working class space. For the first initial part of it, it was just a place to be and from community care nights where we would cook and eat together to actual spaces where you could feel safe in your body where you could just be. From that then emerged a space where people could start thinking about strategies and where they would capitalise and take on for themselves. And so some of that thinking we did together and some of them were already organisers that then got to take it into their own spaces, from housing rights to food justice.

This woman of colour anti-gentrification activist attempted to save an important local market which was home to migrant traders and businesses. Ultimately, the attempt was unsuccessful. Her particular focus is on young people's activism and this is important in light of this defeat because of the ways in which young people struggle to sustain community over time, past this specific moment:

The kinds of successes that are sustainable are the ones that are about how the young people and children view their community and how they've organised for their community. That is something that cannot be erased and that is so powerful in the way that they started to draw what the market represented for them...These are all such relevant testimonies of the formation and education that comes with that, of being able to reclaim a space that is being taken away, seeing your parents fight for their way of life and the whole communities...To make it relevant, about how the market has been a fight for that and a daily questioning of what is right and what is wrong in terms of our wellbeing, safety and how our lives are valued in London and in this society... It comes from not infantilising the ways that they feel, of learning from young people as much as they learn from us. So there was a whole space for children to organise for us, to not only paint which was of course accessible to children but also to participate in videos and documentaries around the market, and to own up their voice and know that they can challenge power anywhere they go.

When building solidarity, for instance around the 'Essex 39' – when the bodies of 39 Vietnamese people were found in a lorry in Essex – this Asian activist is doing careful work to assess relative privileges and work in solidarity with longstanding activism in Black and brown communities:

How we move forward and actually do something practical with the people power that we have in this group and all the different backgrounds that we come from and all the different things that we want from organising around around this. And under that comes how we as a group of East and Southeast Asians make sure that whatever we do is taking into consideration all of our, I guess all of our privileges as a group. And that whatever we do needs to be in solidarity with groups that are doing this work already and that they need to be in solidarity with Black and brown communities that our communities tend to not be very good at showing solidarity with.

France

Our research assistant in France, Dr. Rose Ndengue, explored initiatives including: online activism against the 'fachosphere' [the well-organised online far right], anti-racism in public service trade union activism, antifascism, popular education for working class children, anti-violence against women work, LGBTQI+ rights and police and prison abolition.

Activists described their participation in long-standing struggles over *laïcité* (secularism) and the politics of women's religious body coverings. They describe the need to constantly name and refuse state racism, in the form of Islamophobia. This 'metis'/mixed race woman works in an organisation that supports Muslim women. She articulates the foundation of this work as follows:

So these are the issues we are facing. It is access to school, it is access to employment, and then as with other women, you see, it is pay gap and domestic violence, and rape! It is issues of housing, voilà! and they [Muslim women] have started to say 'No, no, no ! We are not oppressed actually! There is no problem, the veil is a choice. And it is not a choice of submission, it is actually a religious choice. It is just that we believe in God, we submit to God...Don't come at us on those grounds.' And I have the impression that by constantly hammering away with this line, the politicians can't allow themselves – though in any case, they keep trying – but they are less and less credible with this racist theory of the veiled woman, the submissive woman. The more we start to speak out, the more this becomes visible in the media by saying 'No, no, no, no ! We are veiled, we are combative, we are warriors and we do not submit to anyone!' The more we do this, the more we erode the racist discourse.

This work requires making contradictions visible:

*It is for us to do the work of putting politicians in front of their contradictions. If that is what you actually want, to protect veiled women against submission, why not put policies in place that will help veiled women?...If you want their emancipation, why do you vote for laws that prevent them from going to school? This makes no sense. Why is it, if the problem is really that men force women to wear the veil, why don't you make laws that punish men and the people who would be forcing women to wear an item of clothing that she refuses to wear? That would be logical! To my knowledge, the laws on veiled women are the only laws that punish the victim for a crime that she is the victim of...And our work is to point the finger at all these incoherences and to raise the law of the supposed 'We are doing this for the good of the people, for laïcité...'
To say, 'Actually, no, what you're doing is Islamophobia!' It is a policy of Islamophobia. Voilà, it has a name, it is Islamophobia. And that is what we do. Does it bear fruit, I don't know, but we will have tried to do it.*

Activists also identified the importance of online activism alongside work at the grassroots. They noted the success of these approaches in the face of harsh criticism from other groups. For example, this Black activist explained the need to have a solid

presence on social media 'Because, historically we didn't have space in newspapers and magazines or that kind of thing, so it is really through social media and blogs that the thought, the decolonial thinking, anti-racist, Afrofeminist, Pan Africanist [ideas] were spread a bit.' This needs to be what this Afrofeminist activist identifies as an 'intelligent use' of social media. Activists identified a range of online strategies through which they evade trolling and scrutiny by white supremacists. We do not divulge the details of these strategies here to protect these approaches. The broader fact that these strategies exist is important because it indicates the labour and stress, the constant repositioning and inequalities in online activism by women of colour.

To overcome the constraints activism places on activists, several activists emphasised care within their collectives as a defensive and offensive weapon. Activist joy and well-being, rather than outward-facing change, are prioritised in these cases as explained by this Muslim queer activist: 'Us, our collective also doesn't aim to change the world. And so what it does is, we don't do much, I don't know how to say it, we don't undertake actions to find a solution. It is more events to feel well'. Creating spaces to breathe, to relax, and also to network, aiming to challenge stereotypes are identified as objectives in organising Afrofeminist festivals, as this Black activist explains:

I think it is a festival that doesn't reach a lot of people. I would say that the people who come to see us, who participate in most of our events, are urban/city-based women who have pursued higher education, who are already either very interested by Afrofeminist issues or have taken a [public] stand [on these issues]. And I think the events reach this core. And this has an effect, because these are mostly activists, it replenishes [their] energy, these are concrete spaces that allow us to ask ourselves questions and strengthen strategies, to inform and politicise younger people. So it isn't something that has a really big impact in our communities, but it is really powerful for people who participate in these events. And generally, everybody tells me 'Oh là là, I was rejuvenated, it was amazing!' It's kind of funny, because my sister came for the first time and she said this thing to me: 'It's crazy. I met people who came from completely different professional backgrounds. I didn't realise that in fact, it was only Black people, and that we were actually everywhere, and that we could do everything, and that we could be self-sufficient!' So there is also that aspect of challenging stereotypes for people who have just come for the first time also in the Afrofeminist milieu...For people who come and participate, it is something special.

Belgium

Finally, in Belgium, our research assistant Dr. Nicole Grégoire worked with Afrodescendants (women of African descent), activists organising within church-based self-help groups, transnational activists, trade union activists, activists in cultural fields, LGBTQI+ rights and migrants' rights.

This Black Belgian activist organises Afrofeminist workshops and events to make race, often unspoken and unspeakable in the Belgian context, audible:

We are dying and nobody does anything. And to come back to the project, obviously this motivated me, because I wanted it [race] to become central and so that it is no longer denied, and voilà: we will

Speak about racism at university, we will speak about workplace discrimination, we will speak about strategies of struggle and we will name things, in a space that was not necessarily initially made for this, but we will make it visible.

For this racialised queer activist of African origin, it is only by divesting 'to look at each other, rather than to keep looking at the system, or demanding, or asking anything from the system' that liberation is possible. Concretely, her project is:

a physical space that can crystallise what is already there, what's in the air...there is a lot happening. But it remains a bit invisible because there is not a physical space that can bring it all together and make it visible for ourselves...So this is just a little, small center but...the wiring is going all over the globe....

For an activist woman who describes herself as 'dedicated to justice', work for and with new generations is located across Africa, bringing together groups of women to build capacity and leadership, as well as on the continent:

Our presence here should never make us forget where we come from... Even as we are here, we have a duty of restitution, also, in terms of our countries of origin. That is, the link that continues to survive in our migratory pathways and in terms of our origins. It is also these bridges of solidarity that we continue to throw across certain shared projects on the ground. The cause of African women, it is also socio-professional integration in the host country. We are in a country in which we have chosen to live, we have chosen to put our suitcases down, we chose to build here. We work, we participate in the development of this society, through our work, through our engagement. And it is to see also, through participating, what the real situation is of African women who are here, who participate, because it is the reality, that is with or without papers, these women are in the labour market! With or without papers, these women are making the economy of this country run! But how to bring out those who are doing this invisibly, working under the table, so they can do this in a declared way and have social security. It is a major challenge!

Section 4: Supporting activists

We want to conclude this report with some practical steps philanthropies can take to offer material support to activists. Certainly, the activists in our study were split about their willingness to take funding from either the state or private philanthropic organisations. Here is a selection of some of their comments about applying for and receiving funding.

This Afro-Danish activist was at first opposed to collecting donations and receiving funding as she did not want people attracted to her group thinking that they would somehow personally financially benefit. However, once the demands of activism got to a point where funding was required, she relented and the organisation started accepting funding:

In the beginning I was completely opposed to collecting money, now we collect money, now we ask for money...I thought and I've been confirmed a little bit in my [understanding], that where there is money, there is conflict and I didn't want to attract people who come thinking there is something there for the wrong reasons. If you want to come, you want to come because you are anti-racist, and you are tired of things and you really want to do something with the right heart and we can have very different views about where we use the money...But there was really some pressing things that really have to be done, so I was like, okay, so we are opening a bank account and we are collecting money.

Similarly, this Afro-Deutsch activist was also suspicious of receiving funding as she saw funding as a way to undermine solidarity between activists and she remains opposed:

What is also a major challenge for solidarity at the moment: funding, right? Money. So, which organisation applies for which funding, who gets the contract in the end and so on. And that's just a crazy divide and rule mechanism, which then...Yeah, that really disintegrates [solidarity]... When institutional logics get in there, stuff about money and visibility, people's egos. The ego is a huge problem for some organisations, who then always want to sit on podiums, talk to politicians and so on... And then there's so much mistrust...And it's also about who has which contacts. Who gets what kind of information? Because information is really the currency. Who has what kind of networks, who has which kind of contacts? And then information is simply not passed on and stuff.

However, we found that the Berlin activists were divided in their opinions about funding. This Turkish German activist working on education reform supported receiving funding because she felt her group could be more effective in their activism if they did not also have to divert their attention to their day jobs that pay the bills:

How activist are we if we get money for it? Can you call that activism? I think we are incredibly activist, just because we get money for it, that's our right. So, we also experience a lot of shit. You know, right-wing populists in workshops and stuff, all sorts of things...Then they should also pay us for explaining to them how they have to do their work properly, to teachers or educators or whatever... All of us, we all work on

of us, we all work on the side, somehow, and it is super hard. So, we are already satisfied with what we have created, but we are also partly dissatisfied with what we could have created if we were more structured. We just don't have any structural support, we are paid by the Senate administration for workshops and not for everything else, so. And we have to somehow come to terms with that and somehow do everything ourselves.

Similar divisions were evident among London activists. For some activists state funding, in particular, is a 'muzzle' that would also require becoming a formalised organisation, which would fundamentally contradict their ethos. For others, funding should enable self-representation, particularly for migrants, so resources and spaces are provided along with the relationships that allow access to government consultations on issues that directly affect them. Exciting opportunities lie in funding 'middle spaces', according to this Black/PoC gender non-conforming activist:

I'm interested in that movement that can happen where you're like, you try to maintain some principles but you create structure and you try to see how you can work really, really closely with people who are having those experiences but where you recognise that you have to create structure and you have to be resourced. And like how that relationship is maintained and how you don't end up being the NGO with this like, we have two co-directors and two project managers and whatever, like I don't know what that space is, I'm super interested in that.

Others were critical of funders but wanted to work within funding architecture. For this woman of colour activist in London, working with funders is about knowing your worth as:

The revolution will not be funded but money is about sustainability and it's also about worth. And so a lot of the women of colour that I know, we never, we would do ridiculous amounts of free labour but we also didn't know what we were worth...every time women of colour say I am worth not just the same as my white male peers or white female peers but actually more because we're doing more labour, it also opens up for others.

This activist offers insight into why funders seem unwilling to support the work described in this report:

I've met great people inside foundations who have radical ideas but maybe don't have the scope but don't occupy power and usually they're the people of colour, and then a few people who are ready but because of charity commission laws or other things structurally are tied to not being able to [take a] risk, because also our communities are seen as risks.

In Paris, strategies are shaped by the issues and constraints posed by funding from state institutions in particular, as indicated by one focus group participant on the topic of a major event run by the association of which she is president:

[This event], by [our] choice, is not subsidised [by the state]. It is an event that we fund entirely. The association funds it entirely, because, at that moment, I want to talk about what I want, without limits. For me it is the flagship event of the association. As a result, I don't want to say to myself: 'oh yeah, I have to do a report, a balance sheet, so other people will only poorly understand the reasons. I think this is what makes [this event] interesting...We are a registered association, that changes a lot of things. It is a different form of activism. Because you know that you can't do everything, you can't say everything. Sometimes you have to use filters, sometimes you open the door even to people you don't necessarily want to see at your events. You have to have meetings and interact with people you can't stand! Sometimes it's a drag, it's heavy. Other times I tell myself, well, maybe I also piss them off.

While she emphasises the possibilities of freedom from state funding, this Black activist expressed the wish to be able, nonetheless, to make a living from the struggle:

Because they [the racists] struggle, they are practically paid for their struggle. And us, we are still at the stage of: we work for free! That's why even for example on social media, you see more and more women who say "you want me to explain that to you? Paypal!!" Because it is work, though it may not seem to be! And so I'm thinking more and more about how we can make a living through our struggles, actually. But for me, there are ways. I don't know, for example gain more visibility for us too, impose ourselves in the media. Have more and more racialised journalists; Black women journalists who speak about these questions; more and more articles because we launch hashtags, because we gain visibility.

For the same activist, government funding is also needed, because money is the crux of the matter:

I know there are so-called anti-racist organisations, that actually are not anti-racist at all! And who receive massive state funding! And who have means, who get by and earn a living! And we don't make a living! So, already, if we could change the policies governing how state funding is allocated, we could nip in the bud a lot of political initiatives that are not in our favour. So that is how it is. It is what I've learned. These are strategies I either think about, or put concrete things in place even if they are ad hoc, to be able to thwart this as much as possible, to raise awareness of these issues.

Finally, some activists insisted on self-reliance and enterprise, including small-scale market activities to generate income. In Belgium, this African feminist activist described the message of her organisation as follows:

Our message was to say "we are the solution to abolish our own precarity". We are the actors of change, but in precarity, because we can also do things that generate revenue....Yes, the fact of self-

financing. That's it. There are ways and means to overcome financial barriers even when you think they are insurmountable...Women can generate money. It all depends also on their ambitions. There are some women who are able to generate millions, but not everyone can generate money, but you have to find the ways in which you can do these activities, your own activities, to make your living! This is our message.

On balance, we would say that the majority of activists in this study supported receiving some kind of funding, to relieve the immense pressure they were under in terms of stitching together a range of precarious work and attempting to do activist labour at the same time. Note, however, that all funding was not regarded equally. Activists were particularly suspicious and critical of state funding, seeing a need to either reform it or boycott many forms of state funding altogether.

Exhaustion and burnout were a repeating theme across all the research sites, a theme which we have explored elsewhere in greater detail (Emejulu and Bassel 2020). Targeting support to address activist economic precarity would go a long way, in our view, to supporting the infrastructure of women of colour's activism and address activist fatigue. This requires a fully resourced process through which relationships are built over time, outside of single-project cycles. This way support is targeted *with* rather than *at* activists.

Conclusions and Recommendations

1. To provide immediate and transformative support to activists, philanthropies must develop less complicated, faster ways for exhausted activists to secure funding that does not require them to transform their informal networks into formal organisations. This requires a new relationship to risk in order to meaningfully and effectively support activists.
2. Understand and take seriously that women of colour's activism is free labour performed by precarious women. Directly addressing and funding activists' precarious financial circumstances—perhaps through activist fellowships—would go a long way in supporting the broader activist milieu by relieving, albeit temporarily, economic insecurity. This approach prioritises the people doing the work rather than what they are doing, in the form of specific projects and campaigns.

This focus on 'who' rather than 'what' is important because many women of colour activists who participated in our project mobilise on multiple fronts and are engaged in a range of interconnected initiatives e.g. migrant justice and prison abolition, trade union activism and popular education, joy and pleasure activism and public-facing campaigns for colonial reparations. Funding the activist rather than the project enables this vital and creative intersectional work.

3. Particularly in continental Europe where the collection of statistics on race and racism is uneven at best and non-existent at worst: there must be a commitment to funding qualitative and quantitative work which provides insights into the everyday lives of women of colour.

Part of the problem of understanding women of colour's activism is that there has been no systemic collection of data that would help activists, researchers and policymakers understand contexts in which women of colour live, their opinions and perceptions about their society and their roles within it and what kinds of interventions they are undertaking to change their circumstances. Whilst philanthropies cannot be a substitute for the state, they can support better data gathering and collection.

4. Providing direct funding is always best. However, where training in lieu of funding is offered, do not offer training on the assumption that activists do not have knowledge or skills.
5. Respect and defend separatist organising—spaces in which women of colour only are permitted—by making it clear in your funding criteria that this work is welcomed and supported.
6. Support activist work on pleasure, joy and celebration as these activities are a legitimate and valuable part of sustaining activism over the long term.

7. Fund physical spaces for activists to meet to promote new forms of exchange across different generations and groups.

8. Fund the archiving of the ephemeral lives of activist collectives. In the words of this Black trans woman activist in London: 'I want our history to be recorded, I want it to be precious. I want us to treat it as such. Before they work it out and take it into like the basements of the British Museum or something. I just want us to be able to protect our own stuff. And to be able to hold on to our own stories, and to tell new ones...I'm obsessed with telling our stories from a diasporic perspective.'

Seemingly every new generation of activists have to discover the history of women of colour's activism for themselves. Supporting archival work which documents, collects and preserves the histories of women of colour's activism will support the memory work that is so crucial to any kind of present and future activism.

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