

Destination

>> EQUALITY

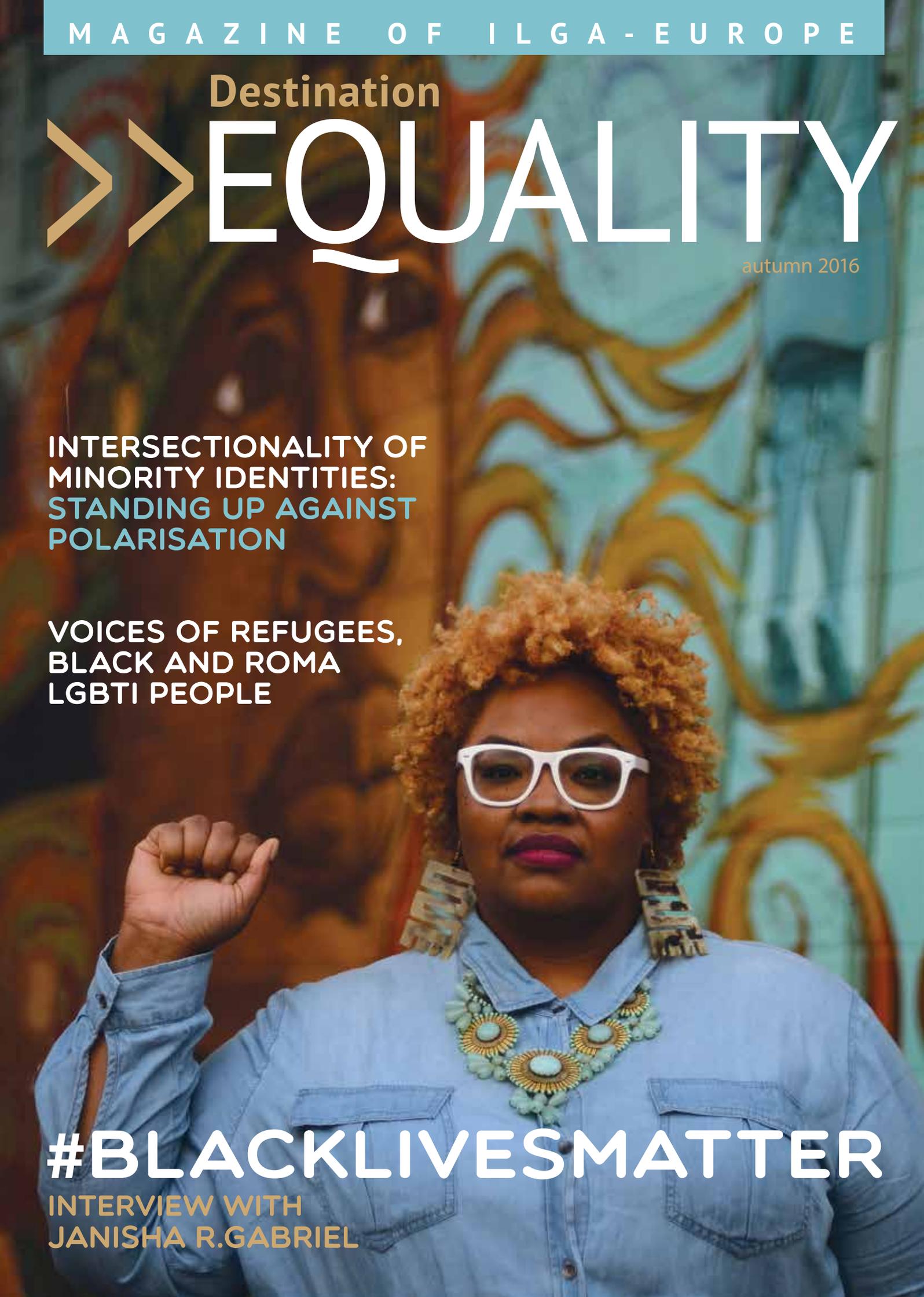
autumn 2016

INTERSECTIONALITY OF
MINORITY IDENTITIES:
STANDING UP AGAINST
POLARISATION

VOICES OF REFUGEES,
BLACK AND ROMA
LGBTI PEOPLE

#BLACKLIVESMATTER

INTERVIEW WITH
JANISHA R. GABRIEL





Evelyn Paradis,
Executive Director

Over my years at ILGA-Europe, two recurring situations have come to illustrate vividly the issues around race and ethnicity in LGBTI spaces in Europe, both in the wider LGBTI movement and within local LGBTI communities.

Firstly, I think of the numerous events I've attended (including ILGA-Europe trainings and conferences) during which someone would stand up and say: "I look around this room and I mostly see white people" or "I find myself to be one of the few non-white people in this room". And they would of course always be right! Then, I am reminded of the many, many conversations I've had with activists who ask for advice on how to react when members of their community express support for anti-immigrant policies and xenophobic politicians.

For me, these two very real situations capture precisely what the wider issues are within our communities and our movement. On one hand, race is all too often invisible or excluded from our activities, from our work, from our discourse. On the other hand, there is a lack of understanding of how different forms of oppression intersect; a failure to recognise our own prejudices and biases, and at times, our own racism.

So, as equality activists, as LGBTI organisations, as a human rights movement, this is where we need to start.

We need to educate ourselves and learn about the experience of being an LGBTI person of colour or of ethnic minority background in Europe. Those of us with a lot of privilege need to think about the space we are holding. We must place the onus on ourselves to enable the meaningful visibility and participation of people with different races and ethnicities in our movement. We have to question whose voices we listen to by default, whose voices we empower – and then think about whose voices are not heard. We need to acknowledge and to tackle the prejudices we hold. We have to speak out and stand up against racism (within and outside LGBTI communities).

This issue of Destination>>Equality is a very first step for us at ILGA-Europe towards naming the specific challenges faced by people of different races and ethnicities in our movement, and making the realities of LGBTI people of colour or from ethnic minority backgrounds visible.

One central message that weaves its way through all the articles is that our fight for equality for LGBTI people demands that we genuinely look at how racism intersects with LGBTI-phobia, patriarchy and heterosexism. As Pav Aktar reminds us, when we do not look at intersections, we inevitably fail to identify the ways that multiple marginalised identities play out in LGBTI lives. Farah Abdi's story also tells us that when we disregard race and ethnicity, we can quickly end up contributing to further discrimination and oppression. In short, tackling race and ethnicity in our collective work matters; because we need to be advocating for the rights and equality of all LGBTI people, not just of some.

The other core message emerging is that we need to stand up against the use of race and ethnicity to foster division and fear in our societies. But to do this, we first need to take an honest critical look at ourselves and challenge our own prejudices. We have to be true allies and commit to the principle that one person's right should never be gained at the expense of another. In the wise words of Audre Lorde, we need to see "that we can be different and use those differences not to destroy each other, but to move."

ILGA-Europe is embarking on a journey to "find what we do not see". To quote Janisha Gabriel from Black Lives Matter, this work will not only be about learning from others, but that it will also be "about *unlearning* yourself, your ways, your thoughts, and your habits".

One group's rights should never come at the loss of another's

Soraya Post, Member of the European Parliament from the Feminist Initiative in Sweden, Co-President of the European Parliament Anti-Racism and Diversity Intergroup

I have always been a human rights activist. Before I became a Member of the European Parliament, I founded several NGOs, working at national level as an advisor to government bodies in Sweden, and on European level as advisor to the Council of Europe and the European Commission regarding the Roma issues. I have devoted my life to working with issues regarding human rights by focusing on the empowerment of Romani women and the self-determination of the Romani society.

During these years, I have faced many different challenges (which I think everyone who works with human rights issues does). The notion of human rights often used within the political arena, does not necessarily include everybody. This is evident as people, throughout our societies, are having their fundamental human rights denied on a daily basis. People are excluded from education, health care, housing and the labor market, solely based on their identities and abilities.

Human rights should apply to all people, regardless of their identities and opportunities offered to them. However, I believe that people are systematically excluded. Why? Partly because Western liberal societies are based on the notion of "universal humanism", which does not acknowledge group differences that enable privileged groups to perpetuate cultural imperialism. This happens when people normalise their experiences in order to appear natural and universal. In this process, the privileged group ignores their own group's specificity, which generates a blindness to disadvantages.

This system is deeply rooted and institutionalised, thus maintained in the everyday practice of people. But it is also reinforced by politics of hatred. In the political climate of today we can spot the growth of xenophobia and populist ideas in politics. We all have noticed how some politicians antagonise different minority groups against each other; supporting some



Soraya Post, MEP

minorities while dismissing others. Different minority groups are used during different periods of time in order to promote a certain political agenda. At present, I feel that LGBTQIA- rights are gaining support. However, at times, this 'support' is used in order to spread hatred against other minority groups. For instance, in the Parliament, some politicians (usually not in favour of LGBTQIA-rights) support the LGBTQIA community to spread racism.

In Sweden, the country where I am from, we have noticed how more politicians and political parties raise the issue of LGBTQIA and gender equality, but only in the context of placing cultures against cultures and creating hierarchies amongst them. Nevertheless it is important to note that this changes over the years. When I started my work at the Parliament, I noticed how some conservative politicians refused to support a report if LGBTQIA-rights were mentioned. However, when they understood that they could use the LGBTQIA-rights as a disguise for their xenophobic views they were quick to take advantage of the situation – and take advantage of the LGBTQIA community.



The consequence of politicians working in this manner are the effects they have on the common opinion throughout our societies; namely, how it creates an insecure population full of fear and hatred for other people. This creates the possibility to maintain oppression of people diverging from the norm. What we have to remember is whom the real threats to our rights and securities are, and not to be fooled by politics of hatred targeting the most vulnerable groups in society. If we, who belong to a minority group, aim to achieve a society free from discrimination in order to get our fundamental human rights met, then we shall never accept politics that rule and divide. One group's rights should never come at the loss of another's.

That is why I know that an intersectional perspective in politics is essential to achieve human rights. It is important to understand and acknowledge that different power structures interlink and create specific kinds of subjugation. Adopting an intersectional approach in politics enables us to make power structures visible, and thus opens up the possibility of creating inclusive policies which take into consideration the different needs of all people in the society, without excluding one or the other. As a result, we have the opportunity to create a society in which our populations have abandoned their fear

and hatred towards each other, and chosen to respect what they do not know.

I know that it is possible to create that kind of society; but in order to do so, we cannot let the politics of hatred rule the mainstream. Despite the fact that we belong to different minority groups, we are all in the same situation. Our common ground for exclusion is white, heteronormative, patriarchal structures. The sense of insecurity that some people may experience is one of the reasons for supporting politics of hatred.

In my political work, I take my point of departure from an intersectional approach in order to make sure that the European political agenda ensures that all people, regardless of their identities and prerequisites, get their human rights recognised.

It is not a coincidence that populism and extremism increase when there is economic regression and social change. As a result, people tend to become more insecure and then they support politicians that seem to favour them by discriminating others. With intersectionality, we are able to hold those with responsibility accountable when they violate the human rights of one group in the name of another.

BEING INCLUSIVE AND A GOOD ALLY: A FEW TIPS!

There are quite a number of things that each and every one of us can do to ensure that our organisations are more inclusive of LGBTI people of colour and from minority ethnic backgrounds. Here are a few good practices to get us all started:

- Speak up and stand up against incidents of racism within your membership and at your events; this is very important to gain the trust of LGBTI people from minority ethnic background.
- Educate yourself! Don't assume you know what racism looks and feels like, be aware that not all experiences of racism are the same. Stay open and listen to people.
- Check your privileges - e.g. the advantages you have compared to others.
- Avoid tokenism - e.g. looking at activities as one-offs rather than as part of processes.
- Make LGBTI people of colour and from minority ethnic background visually represented in your communication tools (such as your website, your publications, your social media) in a meaningful way.
- Follow-up with LGBTI people of colour and from minority ethnic background who come to your events: get feedback and check with them what could have been done better to make sure to strengthen participation in the future
- Think about actions to reach out to LGBTI people of colour and from minority ethnic background, e.g. drop off leaflets about your LGBTI organisation in events or spaces were minority ethnic or people of colour gather.
- Alliance-building is key, but make sure to involve partners from minority ethnic groups from the start of a project and foster shared ownership of processes.

The Great Divide: how conservative forces are enlisting minorities

Michael Privot, Director of the European Anti-Racism Network

Over the last 40 years, the narratives of conservative movements and political parties have become much more sophisticated. Specifically, in how they address minorities and groups at risk of discrimination – from women, gays and lesbians, to selected ethnic and religious minorities. This has happened in part thanks to the impact of progressive ideas within some conservative settings, in part due to strategic political positioning, and partly in the name of the doctrine saying that “if our enemies are the same, we have to work together”. Sometimes minority groups are enlisted in the conservative fight against emerging rights or other potentially vulnerable groups. Sometimes minority groups are used by anti-equality groups as scapegoats to harness the anger required to further their divisive agenda aiming at perpetuating social hierarchisation, the consolidation of wealth by a few, strict heteronormativity or white privilege for example.

One recent disgraceful example of the enlisting of minorities is the effort of Viktor Orban’s government to rally Roma representatives¹ against asylum seekers and refugees. The argument used was that refugees would take away resources needed by the Roma community to bridge the massive exclusion they face on a daily basis. Of course, no one mentioned the systemic anti-Roma sentiment plaguing all power structures in Hungary and the other EU Member States as a possible cause for the fact that funding and grants intended to make a sizeable change for Roma often evaporate before the money reaches their target beneficiaries. The argument used: “If Roma don’t get it, it’s because of refugees”. It is simple but devastatingly powerful rhetoric: it aims to keep Roma, refugees and impoverished middle class majority people from joining together to hold Orban’s government accountable for the general regression of the country in relation to rule of law, social progress, human rights standards.

We observed similar strategies in other countries as well. Far-right and populist right parties are striving to enlist a

¹ <http://www.romea.cz/en/news/world/william-lazarus-bila-roma-joining-the-bandwagon-on-anti-refugee-campaigns>



number of Jewish organisations and representatives against Islam/Muslims/Islamists/jihadists (all categories being lumped together in the minds of their followers); examples include the French Front National, the Belgian Vlaams Belang, the Dutch PVV, the Austrian FPÖ. The Dutch PVV and the Danish VP have been among the first to try to take on-board LGBTQI concerns (not necessarily organisations) as arguments against Islam and Muslims. The French FN is also effective in that area as it works to present itself as the representative of ‘family values’, symbolized by their opposition to marriage equality. And this is where this approach can become extremely perverse: the opposition to marriage equality in France not only mobilised traditional Christians, it was also supported by a number of conservative Muslims (who forgot for a moment that they were the usual targets of the very same conservative groups they were demonstrating alongside with, in the name of a deeper “evil” defined as societal decadence).

Going back to 2007, similar alliances emerged in the UK between private Muslim and Christian schools to oppose the first draft of the EU horizontal directive aimed at protecting



against discrimination based on sexual orientation in education. More broadly, while most of these conservative forces now articulate beautiful discourses in defense of equality between women and men (in particular against those “migrants”/“Muslims” that do not respect “our” values), the small print of their programmes contains a much darker tone. Notably, in relation to the right to abortion, family values, the place of women at work, or even their stance on gender studies: women are far from equal.

As an antiracist and equality activist, I spend a lot of time challenging homophobia and sexism within my own cluster, because our aspiration towards equality calls upon us to be coherent across the board, however tough internal conversations may be. Therefore, I am deeply saddened when I see fellow activists from other movements supporting the very forces that are oppressing them at other moments. I do not wish to discuss the legitimacy of their decisions, or their strategies, which may have elements worth considering. Nevertheless, I have drawn a line for myself: if an individual, an organisation, a party ends up on the same side as a far-right party in a debate, using a *similar* line of argumentation, then there is something wrong in this positioning, and particularly so if this position stigmatises any other potentially vulnerable group.

Of course, it is not because we belong to a minority – whatever it is – that we are immune to prejudices and the victimisation of other. Or that we should all be politically progressive and left leaning: political views are not exclusively defined by our lived experience and societal situation. There is a large spectrum of positioning from very conservative to radically progressive, *but*,

if we consider ourselves equality activists, the indivisibility of human rights must take precedence over all other considerations. “My” equality will never be attained at the expense of the equality of other individuals and groups. We can disagree politically about ways to bring about equality, progress, growth, freedoms, systemic change. However if we consider ourselves as belonging to a minority – any minority – we should not allow ourselves, our causes, our own demands for equality, our movements to be enlisted against other groups and causes, which deserve the same respect, recognition and solidarity.

For me, alliance-building is a key element of the ethics of equality. When faced with violence or threats (including those coming from other (minority) groups) we need to seek opportunities to build alliances with progressive voices from within those groups we feel threatened by, not to seek “security” in the proximity of conservative forces. Other minority groups are on a similar journey as ours. They have fears that need to be heard. Nobody says it is easy. I say it is possible and should be done. My long experience within Muslim communities has taught me – beyond the ruckus of social media polarisation – that, while not everyone is yet ready to fully embrace LGBTQI rights, there is a growing number of a people that are forcefully rejecting homophobia as a threat to social cohesion. This has not been achieved by far-right party embracing LGBTQI rights, but through a better understanding of the similarities of patterns between islamophobia and homophobia. It is coming from growing acknowledgement that you cannot claim equality for yourself while discriminating against others. This was achieved by activists who dared to go beyond their comfort zone and talked with their respective communities about their failure to address equality coherently. And it worked. It is far from enough, undoubtedly, but a great step in a good direction. It’s up to all of us.

Many LGBTI people decide to flee oppression and denial of their basic rights in their home countries, and seek refuge in Europe, hoping to find safety and security. Sadly, problems faced by LGBTI people from third countries do not dissolve when they cross European borders. Too often, LGBTI asylum seekers find themselves caught between hostility from their own communities, and prejudice and rejection in countries where they hoped to find safety. Read this honest testimony by Farah Abdi, a trans woman who fled from Kenya and now lives in Malta. Farah’s journey is a powerful illustration of why the work to achieve LGBTI equality goes hand-in-hand with the work to combat racism and xenophobia.



Emancipation of Mimi-Swahili for me

by **Farah Abdi**

I left home (Kenya) 4 years ago in search of a place that would not only tolerate what I thought was my sexuality at the time, but also celebrate this part of my identity. I arrived in Malta after 9 months of a difficult and dangerous journey across countries, the Sahara and sea. At this point, I was a wounded warrior masquerading as a survivor. More than a decade of internalised homophobia stemming from my conservative roots had done its damage.

I come from a community (Somalis) that has been emotionally and psychologically traumatised by decades of civil war, mass migration and dislocation. In my community, a girl without a headscarf is a harlot-in-training. Such retrogressive taboos become minuscule in comparison to homosexuality. Being gay is not only an amoral form of psychic and sexual corruption, but also an act of perverse, Western mimicry. Any form of sexual difference is considered not only repugnant, but also devious.

It took me more than 2 years of intensive therapy after my arrival in Malta to make peace with my "gay" identity. After this, I was supposed to live the proverbial happy ever after life. Unfortunately this was not the case. There was a missing link that I could not verbalise. The risk of sinking into depression sent me running to my therapist once again in search for answers. Months of deep soul searching brought me to the realization that I was identifying as gay because I was afraid of exploring my femininity. This again stemmed from my conservative roots.

In Somali culture, hyper-masculinity is the most desired attribute in men. Femininity signifies softness, a lightness of touch: qualities that are aggressively pressed onto young girls and women. When a woman does not possess feminine traits, it is considered an act of mild social resistance. This applies equally to men who are not overtly masculine but the stakes are considerably amplified. If a Somali man is considered feminine he is deemed weak, helpless, and pitiful: the underlying message being that femininity is inherently inferior to masculinity. In order for me to embrace who I truly was, I had to go through the painful but fulfilling process of unlearning the toxic pillars that root my culture.

This was a painful process because it meant cutting ties with family and community. It is extremely difficult for a Somali to do this because family and community gave us a home, when our country did not; when our nation state (Somalia) disintegrated and ejected, those with whom we escaped with became our nation with borders that re-collected us in the enormity of loss. So what do you do when first, the nation, then one's family and community reject you? I had always thought



Farah Abdi

of family and community as a fixed, all-powerful entity. I was raised in a culture where family and community was the most important thing. Rightly so. But in order for me to embrace my transgender identity, I had to learn that nothing in life is fixed, especially family and community. Embracing this allowed me the possibility to become my authentic self.

Another challenge I encountered during the process of soul searching was coming to terms with living in a country, continent and world that will readily accept one part of my identity, but force me to discard the other. This is especially true in Malta at a time when it's ok to be transgender, but xenophobia and racism is at an all-time high. The mother of all cures -time- ended up taking care of this.

After 4 years in Malta, I was becoming Maltese through osmosis. Not through naturalisation, integration or registration. The Maltese government and people could deny our rights as refugees and ignore us all they want. I noticed one minuscule change after the other – like consistently saying *Isma* (a Maltese slang commonly used to get someone's attention when trying to start a conversation) for example.

The passage of time continued to affect the change until I appeared another person all together. Do butterflies and moths suffer this perplexity? This 'how did I get here?' and 'who am I?' crisis? They seem to just beat their wings twice and then take to the air. I felt weighed down, burdened, not so much by what I did have but what I didn't, a dearth that I couldn't describe.

The cloud finally lifted when I looked at myself in the mirror and spoke to my reflection. "4 years ago when you first arrived in Malta, you were expatriated, diffident, beautiful, full of longing for a home, and yet hopeful that your new home (Malta) will one day make a place for those like you it rejects, realising that it itself is unhomed – estranged from itself – if it has no place for those like you."

So clearly I don't have a problem with who I am today and if my native Somali community or my adoptive Maltese community have a problem with me being me. Then so be it.

Like Black lives, intersectional identities matter

Pav Akhtar, Director of UK Black Pride,
www.ukblackpride.org.uk



For Black LGBT people, racism and LGBT-phobia are part of the same mindset. So it should surprise no one that Black LGBT people have fought alongside the wider LGBT community for our collective liberation from the very beginning. Indeed, the Gay Rights Movement as we know it, was sparked by Marsha P. Johnson, a Black, gay gender-non-conformist, and Silvia Rivera, a Puerto Rican transgender woman, who both led the Stonewall riot in New York in 1969. This was one of the LGBT communities' foundational liberation movements.

History has taught us that supporting the causes of the larger community, while waiting patiently for that larger community to then pay attention to each of its component parts' needs, has never proved a good strategy for Black people – nor has it been the case for LGBT people in general. Just as Black people have been political pawns, so LGBT people have also been used to launch and further movements, and discarded once our value has been extracted.

As intersectional people, we should know not to ask any group to stay out of sight, when our struggles are front of mind, in the headlines, outlining our needs. And so it was that in 2005 – with a surge in electoral support for Far Right political extremists on the back of their racist and homophobic views – that members of the Black LGBT community in Britain decided the time for waiting was over. We needed full support from the Black and the LGBT

communities' and we needed it immediately. And so it was that UK Black Pride came into being with a mission to combat endemic racism and homophobia inside and outside our communities, as well as tackling other expressions of discrimination that touched our members.

Since UK Black Pride recognises that Black people are not a monolithic community, it made sense to adopt an intersectional approach to dismantle social and systemic oppression. When segments of our community are being targeted based on identity, it should affect us all, and therefore our intersectional work aims to support LGBT and race equality organisations to be more inclusive of all their service users and respect every part of their identity.

Today, we work with a variety of groups with diverse expertise, exchange awareness-raising sessions, and speak to intersectional service users. This partnership work reveals that there are ways to be inclusive without necessarily needing to spend vast swathes of money. It also shows that learning to be inclusive of people with complex identities can benefit every service user, the wider community and society at large.

WHAT IS INTERSECTIONALITY?

Over the years, many people have addressed the issue of intersectionality in many different ways. Some have described being a person with an intersectional identity as standing in the middle of a busy road with traffic coming at them from many sides. Others have said it is like holding their

own birthday party at which they are the essential link between many different circles of friends or family who might otherwise interact. What is clear from these creative ways of describing what intersection means to some individuals is that we can all identify with them to some extent because we all have different aspects to our identities and ourselves. The difficulty arises when all of these different shades of ourselves are not recognized in society or are not protected before the law in the same way.

For instance, a gay man has to deal with homophobia. A Black man has to deal with racism. But a Black gay man will have to deal with homophobia and racism, often at the same time. It is as likely the case that he will face racism inside the LGBT community as it is that he will face homophobia in mainstream communities. Similarly, a disabled lesbian Muslim will have to deal with ableism, homophobia, Islamophobia, racism and sexism. She might find physical barriers to accessing LGBT venues, but even when she can get into the building she might still face racism and Islamophobia from within the LGBT community.

WHEN INTERSECTIONALITY IS ERASED

Having an intersectional identity can create a feeling that someone does not completely belong in one group or another. It can lead to isolation, depression and other mental health issues. In this context the conscious, or unconscious, exclusion and erasure of intersectional people from our communities is reflected in diminished access to community and public service provision. Often LGBT-focused organisations have little knowledge of, for example, race issues. This can lead to racist attitudes and practices being carried by staff, or other service users, and these can remain unchecked. This can create unsafe spaces for Black LGBT people who are in need of accessing specific community or public services. Despite the obvious problems intersectionality is still not on the tip of everyone's tongue. Yet.

If we can learn something from these failing – intentional or unintentional – then it is that we have a chance to build bridges. Of course, adopting intersectional approaches to LGBT human rights work is not a panacea. Nor does it guarantee that mistakes will not be made.

What is to be gained from taking an intersectional approach to LGBT human rights work is that it provides the means to unpack the multiple identities that make up a person and understand the different types of discrimination and disadvantage that can result from those combinations of identities. This intersectional approach to human rights activism is designed to address the way in which systems of discrimination can create inequalities that structure the lives of marginalised people. It is an approach that tries to take account of historical, social and political contexts while also recognizing the unique individual experiences that result from the coming together of different types of identity.

BRIDGING INTERSECTIONAL GAPS

For some activists the movement for LGBT peoples' human rights can appear separate to the struggles for race or other equality and justice movements. For some activists the rights of LGBT people can also appear to be in competition with other groups for space and resources. However, human rights activists using intersectional approaches to their work might argue that the two examples above ignore the fact that LGBT people exist in every community, group or context, and that people from all other groups exist within LGBT communities. It is an incontrovertible truth that people with intersectional identities face heightened levels of exclusion and discrimination.

For this reason alone, a narrow approach to human rights cannot do justice to the issues of intersectionality. However, if human rights activists do not look at intersections, we risk painting an incomplete picture of the communities that we seek to serve, which inevitably fails to identify the ways that multiple marginalised identities play out in LGBT lives.

Addressing human rights violations against LGBT people through an intersectional perspective can help us move towards meaningful progress. Intersectionality has the potential to expose interlocking relationships of oppression and privilege, and paint a clear picture of LGBT peoples' lived experiences. Through an intersectional lens, human rights activists and policy makers can also expose how socio-economic and political structures of patriarchy, capitalism or neo-liberalism generate and perpetuate inequality in all societal spaces. It can also show the way in which statutory institutions can incubate models of oppression that affect marginalised groups.

The intersectional approach to human rights can help advocates for LGBT people rights to make links between concurrent forms of oppression and discrimination, showing that social injustice cannot be eliminated in isolation. Rather, intersectionality can inspire human rights activists to collaborate and support one another across movements and initiatives for human rights to benefit from an intersectional approach to their work.

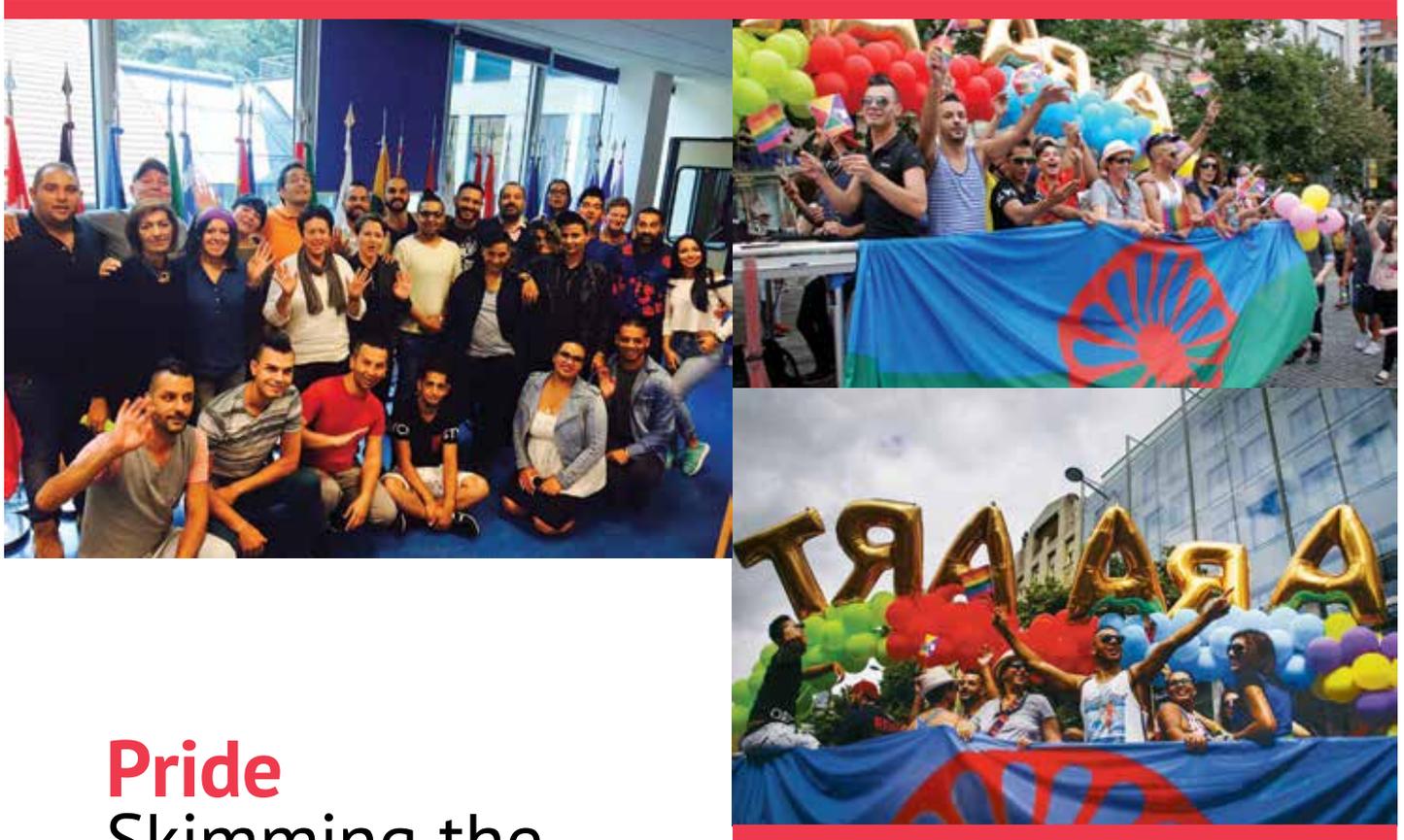
INCLUDING INTERSECTIONAL IDENTITIES

Taking an intersectional approach requires us to avoid the alienating trap which creates artificial hierarchies of oppression where one group or characteristic is presented as more victimised or privileged than another. The hierarchies approach invariably provokes a negative backlash. This is why taking a solidarity-based approach can make meaningful distinctions and similarities in order to overcome discrimination. It can also help to put in place the conditions for all people to fully enjoy their human rights in a more constructive and inclusive way.

Intersectionality should therefore be utilized by LGBT human rights advocates as a tool for analysis, advocacy and policy making that addresses multiple discriminations and helps to comprehend how different circles of identities impact people's access to rights and opportunities.

In August 2015, 28 representatives of Romani LGBTIQ groups from 12 countries hosted the first International Roma LGBTIQ Conference in Prague to address issues faced by LGBTIQ Roma, Gypsy, Sinti and Travellers across Europe. Participants to this first European LGBTIQ Roma gathering adopted a Prague declaration on the lived realities of LGBTIQ Roma, Gypsy, Sinti and Travellers in Europe and the impact of the national legislation on their everyday lives. One of the Declaration points was a direct call to ILGA-Europe and other human rights organisations for closer cooperation and for actions bringing visibility to the specific issues faced by LGBTIQ Roma, Gypsy, Sinti and Travellers.

ILGA-Europe do want to learn more about existing and growing LGBTIQ Roma initiatives and organisations, and to share this information. This is why we are particularly happy to present two contributions in this magazine: the first piece comes from LGBTIQ Roma groups presenting their priorities and current activities and talking about growing visibility. The second article is from one of the leading Russian mainstream human rights organisation ADC Memorial which does not shy away neither from addressing the LGBTIQ nor Roma human rights issues; they shed some light on situation of LGBTI Roma people in their own context.



Pride Skimming the Surface of LGBTIQ Roma Intersectionality

by William Bila, Lucie Fremlova,
Demetrio Gomez, Vera Kurtic,
Iulian Stoian, David Tiser

The Second Annual International LGBTIQ Roma Conference took place on 8-14 August 2016 during Pride Week in Prague. Most of us know the historical significance of Pride as a commemoration of the Stonewall Riots of June 1969 in New York City. Since then, LGBTIQ Pride Day celebrations have turned into week-long events held year round all over the world. For two years in a row, LGBTIQ Roma have played a visible role in Prague's Pride celebrations thanks to ARA ART, a local NGO that has brought together Roma from across the country and Europe for this event.

ROMA PRIDE

When you look up Roma Pride in any search engine, among other things, you will find descriptions of LGBTIQ Pride events in the city of Rome, Italy. If you sift through these search results, which may prove easier if you use another language like Hungarian, Czech, or French, you will find an event taking place in October for the past several years in a variety of European cities. The event seems – as it is presented – to have nothing to do with LGBTIQ Pride. No acknowledgement or LGBTIQ-inclusive aspect of these Roma Pride events can be readily perceived by most of the general public.

The irony of using a "Pride" event as a model, without explaining to the general Roma public the logic or history behind essentially copying the LGBTIQ rights movement, is a lost opportunity to build a greater alliance and awareness of the similarities between the movements, regardless of whether we even get to address the issue of intersectionality.

How would it be seen in the Roma communities if we LGBTIQ Roma tried to appropriate the Pride event and bring light to the success of the LGBTIQ emancipation movement and its influence on creating Roma Pride in Paris, Budapest or even Prague? How would they feel if they knew we were following the exemplary behavior of LGBT activists over the past 46 years and following a "gay" example? We won't know until we speak up. It is our duty as LGBTIQ Roma to raise the issue of LGBTIQ rights within the Roma space. Why haven't we done so? Perhaps because due to our experiences at the intersection of several forms of oppression, including racism, anti-Romani sentiments, sexism, homo/bi/transphobia and heteronormativity, we don't see our own Roma community as being the most oppressive force in society. Roma are not necessarily more or less homophobic than any other group; this depends on whether they have been sensitised to the issues or have had any personal contact with LGBTIQ individuals. Perhaps the lack of recognition of diversity within the greater LGBTIQ movement is an issue for us, too. How many prominent leaders of the LGBTIQ movement are people of color?

Or, maybe we have to change our priorities entirely.

Let's look at the issue of youth homelessness and poverty. Young Roma who come out to their families as LGBTIQ seem to face a greater risk of rejection than non-Roma youth. Whether that risk is actually greater remains to be proven; however, the general perceptions of stronger family ties, the need for belonging within a family unit as well as the generally more conservative, often religious nature of the Roma (as compared to non-Roma) population, all seem to have a more profound impact on the perceptions held by Roma youth. This gives rise to an acute need for housing and psychological assistance for LGBTIQ Roma youth who have been rejected by their families to prevent homelessness and a life-long cycle of poverty. In the Czech Republic, ARA ART is working with municipal authorities and taking the lead in beginning to address this issue. We are unaware of any national organisation for homeless LGBTIQ youth exists in the Czech Republic, and so in this case the Roma are taking the lead. We hope this will help to better the lives of all LGBTIQ youth in the Czech Republic, Roma and non-Roma alike. In France, La Voix des Roms wants to be available to offer additional support to Roma youths especially by letting them know their sexual orientation does not prevent them from continuing to be Roma.

Finally, this brings us to what we really wanted to share with you: the results and future aspirations of the LGBTIQ Roma movement and how these were manifest at this year's conference. Very simply, our priorities are: to build awareness of the existence of LGBTIQ Roma among at-risk youth, build awareness among the general public of at-risk LGBTIQ youth, protect these youths from economic and psychological danger, and help them achieve their full human potential.

Some LGBTIQ Roma youth, who have experienced homelessness and isolation, are a living testimony of the suffering they have endured at the hands of human traffickers. Thanks to the support of staff who work with Roma LGBTIQ youth, there is a need to make our community more visible and make alternatives available to those who want to live their lives openly and honestly – through positive role models, by being visible. Potentially, we can have the greatest impact by implementing and living the Prague declaration we, the LGBTIQ Roma, Gypsy, Sinti and Traveller European Platform, put forth in 2015, with an added emphasis on empowering youth. Reaching out to those who don't know we exist starts by being visible, but in order to prevent suicide and abuse, in order to inspire and provide hope, we need to reach young people and their parents. Through projects like Queer Roma, Ververipen - Roms por la diversidad, Mindj Panther and the work of RomaniPhen and the women behind this work we have great examples and powerful role models. If parents learn their



children are not alone, that there is no shame but rather a great deal of pride to be taken in their LGBTIQ Roma children, we will

all become much more visible for the benefit of all European society.

When you are a minority within a minority

by **Stephania Kulaeva,**
ADC Memorial, adcmemorial.org

I met Arthur (the name is changed) when he was 19 – and he was glowing with his bright smile, white shirt, blue-black hair and a beautiful dark face. Arthur introduced me to his Roma family – kind parents, beautiful sisters, and nephews. They lived together – united, joyful, and poor.

The family observed ‘Roma traditions’ – they celebrated all necessary holidays, women wore long skirts, men knew a great deal about horses, and they kept cattle. Arthur stood out somehow in this environment: he eagerly helped his mother at home, could not eat the dishes with the meat of slaughtered household cattle in them, and once set free a hedgehog that had been caught in the forest for a traditional gypsy meal. His sensitivity and compassion showed also in his acknowledgement of injustice in the human society, exclusion of the gypsy community from the life of his hometown, and discrimination. I do not know exactly when he realised that within his own community – within this excluded and discriminated against minority – he was again doomed to experience misunderstanding and rejection because of his sexual orientation. Arthur moved to a big city, got in touch with other people, but within LGBTI communities he still remained unusual – other by appearance, other by origin, other by his habits and values. Arthur always remained a minority within a minority: when he sought help from parents – who loved him fully, but could not step over the enormous pressure of traditions that replaced in their environment all other regulations; and when he tried to integrate into the life of the Russian capital, where, as he confessed with bitterness, his appearance was seen as a sexual commodity, where he was exploited and not recognised as a person.

A painful split between two hardly-compatible identities is not rare; significant others around a gay Roma or a gay Jew are often not ready to accept this person fully, everyone pulls in their own direction, carrying out, as they think, their best

intentions. Another young man I’ve known since his childhood chose to break with his Roma family, to reject them, who were so harsh in not accepting his sexual orientation, to walk out into another world, to try to even forget his native language. It is not easy at all, and if at every step in a pale-faced country your own face raises a question – who are you? – it becomes even more painful.

The most progressive people nowadays are more comfortable in accepting sexual orientation and gender identity diversity rather than someone’s loyalty to their origins. It is true not only of the LGBTI community; in general, people often do not acknowledge that it is problematic to remain committed to the traditions of one’s community while openly declaring otherness in terms of sexual orientation and gender identity.

Traditional (sometimes religious, sometimes – not) mindset is seen as backward and harmful, an enemy of freedom of choice, progress and culture. But what constitutes freedom of choice, and what counts as culture? I have had heated debates with people who condemned Roma activists for wearing traditional long skirts. “How can they talk about human rights and women’s rights, and when it comes to themselves wear these terrible outdated clothes?” exclaimed ladies in skirt suits – in my opinion, the most uncomfortable and impractical attire, which, however, is considered not just acceptable, but the only correct look at “business” meetings.

I think a lot more courage in defending one’s choices, culture and identity is required for coming to such a meeting in a long skirt than following the ‘business dress code’. Often we, human rights defenders, are convinced in our righteousness as much





as people with a “traditional mindset”, and also – if not more – intolerant.

Once our organisation, the Anti-Discrimination Centre “Memorial”, hosted a two-day roundtable on the problems of compact Roma settlements, which gathered respectable community leaders. On the first day, we discussed their pressing concerns – legalisation of construction, roads, water, electricity. Before dinner, I warned everyone: tomorrow we will talk about discrimination against LGBTI in closed communities, if anyone does not approve of this theme – feel free to not attend, but those who join are asked to abstain from insults or condemnation. Anxious, we arrived to the office for the second meeting day, fearing that there would be too few participants. However, to our delight, all the participants were already seated, looking friendly and suited up. The round table went great – experts shared their input, a discussion ensued, the elders listened to everything calmly and left. After the event, I exchanged impressions with one of the participants – an openly gay Roma. I was surprised that the “barons” accepted the matter so calmly and even showed a clear interest, not hiding it from us or from each other. “What do you think,” said Mikhail. “If you are a baron of a large camp, how could you not know what happens.” Life experience, direct knowledge and an understanding that it is necessary to accept people in their diversity and to find ways to peaceful co-existence, helped

these “barons” to establish themselves as a lot more tolerant, wise and inquisitive than some of the recognised human rights defenders. I wish they could enjoy such acceptance and understanding themselves – with their behaviors, appearances, lifestyles, culture and choices in life trajectories, without any “normative” models imposed on them.

People combatting discrimination should remember that we are dealing with a wide range of issues, from the right to same-sex family to the right to wear a hijab. At times these rights are seen as mutually contradictory, but that’s only at first sight. In fact, everything is simple: everyone - regardless of their origin, ethnicity, culture, religion, sexual orientation or gender identity – should have access to all rights just like all other people, near and far. The current European legislation has come close to documenting this principle (“All human beings are born free and equal in dignity and rights”, Article 1 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights) in its laws. But one thing in which this principle is still very far away not only from the implementation in practice (in practice, even Europe has a lot of problems with discrimination), but also from legal framework: people are born far from equal in their rights as they are born with different citizenships. Citizenship of any of the EU States provides many more rights – to a choice of identity, to freedom of movement, and to social security – than citizenship in a country in the southern or eastern parts of the world. This injustice is also to be addressed – children do not choose their citizenship.



Janisha R. Gabriel

#BlackLivesMatter

Interview with **Janisha R. Gabriel**, one of the leading figures of the #BlackLivesMatter movement in the USA.

Janisha holds a Master of Arts in Old Testament Literature from Alliance Theological Seminary, and a Bachelor's from Howard University. A life-long activist, she has been involved in numerous social justice initiatives, centering on efforts to advance Black liberation, gender justice, and LGBTQ equality. Janisha is currently a board member of The BLK Projek a South Bronx non-profit fighting to bring healthy food to low income residents, and Technology & Design organiser with the #BlackLivesMatter organisation. Passionate about ending violence against black women and girls, Janisha is also founder of the Speak My Name Project, an online database profiling Black women and girls who have lost their lives to state or intra-racial violence. A graphic designer and web designer by trade, she is Founder and Owner of Haki Creatives, a boutique creative agency serving non-profit and grassroots organisations.

MANY PEOPLE ACROSS EUROPE HAVE HEARD ABOUT BLACK LIVES MATTER. COULD YOU PLEASE TELL US A LITTLE MORE ABOUT THE MOVEMENT, WHY AND HOW IT HAS EMERGED?

The present Black Lives Matter movement is a continuation of a centuries-long fight for Black freedom worldwide. In America, this movement has been present since the first Africans were brought here as slaves. We are rooted in the resistance of revolutionaries like Harriet Tubman and Nat Turner, and movements like The Haitian Revolution, The Civil Rights Movement and the Black Power movement from the 70's. Black people in the Americas have always been freedom-fighters. Our movement isn't new, but we are in a new iteration of the movement.

The Black Lives Matter movement focuses its work on any and all forms of state violence against Black bodies, and was conceptualized about 3 years ago. When George Zimmerman was acquitted for the murder of 17-year-old Trayvon Martin, the phrase #BlackLivesMatter emerged on Facebook, and remained a hashtag for the next year. A year later, 18-year-old Michael Brown was murdered in Ferguson, Missouri, by a white police officer, and the community in Ferguson (which is largely Black) erupted, taking to the street in protest. They were immediately met with military grade weapons, and subjected to shootings, beatings, flash-bombs, and tear-gas by local police and the National Guard. The violence against, and resistance of, the people of Ferguson was captured on social media, with on-the-ground organizers and activists tweeting and video streaming the horror they encountered. A call was made for Black organisers from around the United States to meet in Ferguson at the end of August to support the community and help them organise and resist. This became known as the "Black Lives Matter Freedom Ride," and set the base for the present Black Lives Matter network.

The resistance in Ferguson happened at a time when many US-based Black-led organizations were engaging a more radical trajectory and, combined with the Ferguson resistance, helped establish our present movement. **THOUGH BLACK LIVES MATTER IS OFFICIALLY A NETWORK OF CHAPTERS, THERE IS A BROADER MOVEMENT OCCURRING, ONE THAT CONSISTS OF MANY DIFFERENT GROUPS WORKING TOGETHER FOR A COMMON CAUSE: THE LIBERATION OF BLACK PEOPLE WORLDWIDE.**

WE UNDERSTAND THAT INTERSECTIONALITY IS AT THE CORE OF YOUR MOVEMENT'S PHILOSOPHY AND APPROACH. CAN YOU ELABORATE ON THIS PARTICULAR ASPECT? FIRSTLY, WHY THIS APPROACH WAS CHOSEN, AND SECONDLY, HOW DOES IT IMPACT YOUR POLITICAL AGENDA AND YOUR PRACTICES? HOW DO YOU ENSURE THAT THE INTERSECTIONAL APPROACH IS SHARED WITHIN THE MOVEMENT?

The movement is built on the idea that ALL Black lives matter. We cannot just fight for heterosexual, cisgender, able-bodied men, but for all Black people, regardless of our identities. There are particular struggles faced by Black cisgender & transgender women, Black LGBTQI folks, Black children, Black immigrants, the Black disabled community. All of our lives matter and we are all subject to anti-black state violence, though that violence is nuanced based on gender, sexuality, etc. Black ciswomen are the fastest growing group to be incarcerated in the United States. Black transgender women have a life expectancy of 35 years of age. There are more than 600,000 undocumented Black immigrants in the United States, and Black people with disabilities are frequently killed by police during mental health crises. **OUR MOVEMENT IS INTERSECTIONAL IN THAT WE RECOGNISE THAT BLACKNESS ISN'T LIMITED TO CIS-HETERO MEN, BUT THAT BLACKNESS IS EXPANSIVE AND COVERS A MULTITUDE OF IDENTITIES. THEREFORE, OUR PHILOSOPHY IS ONE THAT MUST TAKE INTO ACCOUNT THE TOTALITY OF ANTIBLACK VIOLENCE, KNOWING THAT ALL OF OUR LIVES ARE IN DANGER.**

Our political agenda is impacted by this in that we understand that immigration laws, access to healthcare, affordable housing, etc., are all a part of the work we are doing. Our goals aren't just to end police violence, but to ensure Black people can live dignified lives. Establishing this is not an easy task, and intersectionality takes time to create. What we do is meet everyone in the spirit of Black love, call out problematic behavior when it happens, and also patiently and fervently work together. Organising and mobilising is impossible without growth and self-examination. We are doing all of that, and working toward a safer future.

AS AN LGBTI HUMAN RIGHTS ORGANISATION AND MOVEMENT, WE WOULD BE PARTICULARLY INTERESTED TO HEAR ABOUT THE LGBTI INCLUSIVENESS OF YOUR MOVEMENT. CAN YOU ELABORATE ON THE WORK DONE WITHIN YOUR MOVEMENT TO MAKE SURE LGBTI PEOPLE AND ISSUES ARE ON BOARD?

Two of the three women who founded the hashtag #BlackLivesMatter are queer, and many, many, many others of us are members of the LGBTQI community. Matter of fact, the Trans Women of Color Collective was an early partner to the Black Lives Matter network, and was instrumental in shaping our political trajectory. TWOCC used social media and organisational leadership to help develop the work of BLM and the movement at large. The knowledge we gained from this relationship cannot be understated: it was grounding to our foundation.

THE MOVEMENT IS BROAD, AND AS WITH INTERSECTIONALITY, WE WORK TO ENSURE THAT EVERYONE HAS A VOICE. Because this movement is a continuation of centuries of struggle, we stand on the

shoulders of freedom-fighters like Bayard Rustin, Lorraine Hansberry, and Marsha P. Johnson. Their legacies cannot be minimized, and neither can the legacies we are creating now.

It is necessary, though, for us as Black people, and especially those of us who are queer and trans, to consider the impact of the modern LGBTQI rights movement and its relevance to the Black struggle. White and non-Black LGBTQI people can be complicit in antiblackness, and the LGBTQI rights movement in the United States is not without problems. White LGBTQI people can and often do perpetuate white supremacy through social structures such as gentrification. Our work as a movement isn't to model the mainstream LGBTQI movement, but to uplift the fullness of Black life. Before European colonisation in Africa, variances in gender and sexual identity were typically embraced. This being said, because all Black life matters, this includes the lives of people with whom we disagree.

AND FINALLY, WITH THIS EDITION OF DESTINATION>>EQUALITY, WE ARE ADVANCING CONVERSATIONS ON INTERSECTIONALITY BETWEEN RACE/ETHNICITY AND SEXUAL ORIENTATION, GENDER EXPRESSION, GENDER IDENTITY, SEX CHARACTERISTICS. THIS PROCESS IN EUROPE IS STILL IN ITS INFANCY. CAN YOU GIVE THE LGBTI MOVEMENT HERE ANY ADVICE OR SUGGESTIONS - ON HOW WE SHOULD GO ABOUT MAKING SURE THAT OUR MOVEMENT IS FULLY INCLUSIVE AND WE ARE NOT LEAVING ANYBODY BEHIND ON OUR ROAD TOWARDS EQUALITY?

Black LGBTQI people, and LGBTQI people of color have been having conversations on intersectionality for decades, though these conversations may be hidden from mainstream view. Because we live in various intersections we cannot avoid analysing the ways the patriarchy interacts with white supremacy, and the way they collude in antiblackness, cissexism and heterosexism. My first suggestion would be to find what you do not see: the resistance of work of LGBTQI people of color. After this I suggest you put LGBTQI people of color in leadership of your growing movement. It is always a good thing to read, and digest the experiences of current and past LGBTQI people of color, and to be always willing to challenge your own self-image. **THE WORK OF INTERSECTIONALITY ISN'T SO MUCH ABOUT LEARNING OTHERS, IT IS ALSO ABOUT UNLEARNING YOURSELF, YOUR WAYS, YOUR THOUGHTS, AND YOUR HABITS.** How do you, as individuals, and your community as a collective, perpetuate oppressive systems that necessitate intersectionality?

This means thinking of "the least of these" and making their needs your center. That isn't to erase anyone else's trauma or struggle, but when we are unintentional we commonly think only of ourselves and our needs. What is the place of immigrants, lesbians, Black people, people of color, disabled people in the emerging European movement? Centering these voices, and tangibly supporting their struggle will create a better world for all.

„I BELIEVE IN SOCIETIES THAT DO NOT USE MEMBERS OF THAT SOCIETY ...FOR THE PROFIT OF OTHER PARTS OF THAT SOCIETY.

I BELIEVE PASSIONATELY IN SOCIETIES THAT DEFINE THE GOOD IN TERMS OF HUMAN NEEDS AS OPPOSED TO TERMS OF PROFIT.

I BELIEVE THAT IT IS POSSIBLE TO HAVE SOCIETIES...
...THAT DO NOT CATEGORIZE, REJECT, TRIVIALIZE, OBJECTIFY OTHER HUMAN BEINGS BECAUSE OF THEIR DIFFERENCES.

THAT WE CAN BE DIFFERENT AND USE THOSE DIFFERENCES NOT TO DESTROY EACH OTHER, BUT TO MOVE.

THESE ARE THE THINGS THAT I BELIEVE...

ALL POWER IS RELATIVE.

NO ONE OF US CAN BRING ABOUT CHANGE BY OURSELVES.

BUT FOR EACH OF US OUR PART IS VITAL.

YOU ARE RESPONSIBLE FOR USING THAT POWER, WHATEVER IT IS!

AND THAT IS NOT ALTRUISM.

THAT IS SURVIVAL.“



Audre Lorde

„Black, lesbian, mother, warrior, poet”: this is how Audre Lorde (1934-1992) described herself. By writing on the crossings of her different identities, Audre Lorde offered a major contribution to thinking on intersectionality, way before the term was actually coined. She dedicated her life to combatting social inequalities, whether in the form of racism, sexism or homophobia, in the US where she was born and in Germany where she lived for several years. She inspired generations of activists, in particular Afro-American and Afro-German women, to speak up and keep fighting for social justice.



Rue du Trône/Troonstraat 60, 1050 Brussels Belgium. Telephone: + 32 2 609 54 10

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Contributors: Soraya Post, Michael Privot, Pav Akhtar, William Bila, Lucie Fremlova, Demetrio Gomez, Vera Kurtic, Iulian Stoian, David Tiser, Stephaniea Kulaeva, Farah Abdi.

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