

European *Alternatives* Journal

Democracy
Equality & Culture
Beyond
the Nation State



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Imagine, Demand, Enact

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Ami Weickaane, known by her alias Bluuu, is a versatile creative professional with a rich and diverse background who defies classification. Born in Dakar, she has spent much of her life in Paris. With over two decades working in creative industries, Bluu is known for her work as a visual poet, artist-activist, curator, and content producer. She is also an independent researcher and lecturer, focusing on subjects like arts, heritage, gender, ecology, and African descendants. She is on the transnational board of European Alternatives.

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Spring is a time for new beginnings. In the EU, reproductive rights are high on the agenda as France inscribes the right to abortion into its constitution in a historic win for women's rights, catalysing a push for the right to be guaranteed EU-wide. As Segolene Pruvot outlines in the Transversal Visions section of this journal, womens' rights across the continent are by no means guaranteed - yet movements and organisers on the ground are enacting daily successes that we should celebrate. In the same section one such woman, artist Ami Weickaane, makes the case for her own enfranchisement as a decades-long resident of France who is still denied the right to vote – a pertinent issue as the EU elections approach.





Outside Europe, global attention is still on the unfolding genocide in Gaza, where thousands of women and children continue to be killed, pregnant women have no medical facilities and premature babies are left for dead in bombed hospitals. The military applications of artificial intelligence have contributed to the high civilian death-rate. Ron Salaj, in an article on the uses and misuses of AI, argues that AI is the 'Other' of human and that we must resist it.

Drawing on his latest research, Alvaro Oleart reflects on how the failures and successes of the global Palestine solidarity movement highlight the need to continue building an intersectional, decolonial 'movement of movements' to push mass mobilisations onto the level of permanent organisation, tangible power and concrete, material wins. This means continuing to connect with other anti-imperial struggles from the Congo and Sudan to Ukraine, as well as thematic global movements such as the climate movement, workers' organising and human rights struggles.

In the Assembling, Organizing, and Connecting section of the journal, Seema Syeda presents a case study of a Muslim women-led transnational anti-Islamophobia initiative; Bertie Coyle from Just Stop Oil makes the case for citizens' assemblies as a more radical tactic than direct action; Rafa Font suggests alternatives to Big Tech; and EA presents two new podcasts highlighting transnational organising and migrant workers' experiences: *Beyond the Nation-State* and *Workers Without Borders*.

Last but not least in our Art Beyond Borders section, Celia Zayas transports us to a cultural festival on the sleepy volcano island of Annobón; Dina Ntzoria celebrates the power of diaspora art; Péter Tasnádi-Sáhy tells us more about the methodology of transformative theatre; and we watch Marion Colard in situ at her Série « PATA » exhibition, a co-created event representing the rich lives of Cluj's Roma communities.

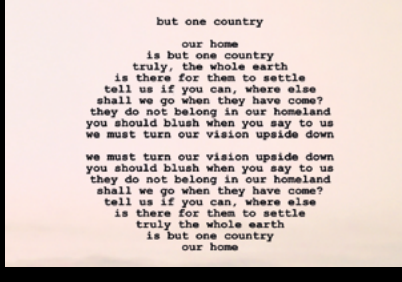



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TRANSVERSAL **VISION**
TRANSPERSONAL **VISION**

‘We

Are

Many’

Ami Weickaane reflects on the lived experience of being ‘Euro but not European’ and presents a manifesto for change.

Stills from Ami Weickaane's video installation and film work "Vague à l'âme, a black woman tale" which has been recently exhibited during the Southnord Triennale at Kulturhuset in Stockholm from October 2023 to January 2024. The installation explores the journey of black women migration across Africa and Europe focusing on mental health to question the "Strong Black Woman Myth".

Credit: Ami Weickaane.

The article tells the story of an Afro-European woman who has lived in Europe for over two decades and highlights the issue of exclusion despite significant contributions to her adopted country's cultural and economic life. The woman in question is excluded from the political process – unable to vote or influence policies that affect her daily life and community.

‘The criteria for naturalisation are strict, and policies often reflect the continent's struggle with questions of identity and acceptance.’

Her story raises essential questions about belonging and inclusion in modern Europe. Despite living, working, raising a family, and paying taxes in a European country, she needs to gain the legal recognition that comes with nationality, preventing her from fully embodying what it means to be European. This exclusion extends to one of the most fundamental rights in a democratic society: the right to vote. As the European elections approach, she and many others in similar situations find themselves voiceless, unable to influence decisions that affect their lives and the communities they have grown to love.

The predicament of non-EU nationals like her is a personal issue and reflects broader legal and political dynamics within Europe. The criteria for naturalisation are strict, and policies often reflect the continent's struggle with questions of identity and acceptance. As a result, many long-term residents are left in limbo. They are Europeans in every sense except legally, contributing to their communities, economies, and social fabric, yet excluded from the democratic processes that shape the continent's future. It is crucial to ensure that these individuals are not left behind.

Moreover, the challenges faced by these communities have intensified due to the rise of extreme right-wing politics in Europe. Xenophobic rhetoric and policies not only make their situation worse but also contribute to a hostile environment.

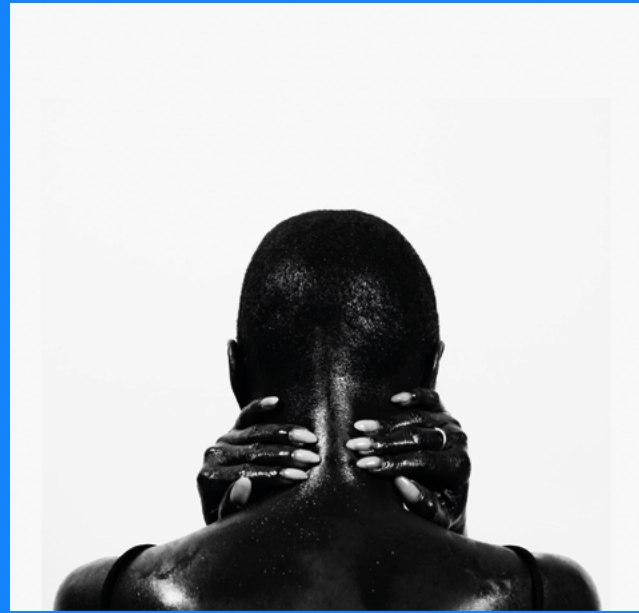
The story of this Afro-European woman prompts us to consider the meaning of citizenship and belonging in a changing Europe. It challenges us to reflect on how inclusive our definitions of democracy and participation truly are.

A critical gap in the European Union's approach to inclusion and democracy

This story is not only about an Afro-European woman who faces many complexities and challenges. ‘We Are Many’ is a testament, a manifesto, and a wake-up call as she represents a diverse group of people, including doctors, neighbours, hairdressers, students, journalists, and many others. Despite being deeply integrated into her host country, her journey highlights a critical gap in the European Union's approach to inclusion and democracy. As of early 2019, **approximately 21.8 million non-EU nationals lived in the EU**, making her situation far from unique. These individuals contribute to their communities and the economy daily. However, they often have little say in shaping policies that affect their lives.



‘The exclusion of long-term, non-citizen residents from the electoral conversation raises questions about the representativeness of European democracies.’



As we approach 2024, a year marked by global elections, let us find the courage to become the protagonists of our own stories

The experience raises critical questions about identity and social cohesion. The status of long-term residency without citizenship can impact one's identity and the broader social fabric of Europe. The absence of a legal pathway to complete belonging challenges the notion of a unified European identity and risks creating divides within societies.

Balancing these two priorities is crucial. European immigration and naturalisation policies are at a crossroads between ensuring national security and upholding human rights and inclusion principles. How can we rethink these policies to protect both citizens and non-citizens' dignity and rights without compromising either?

The exclusion of long-term, non-citizen residents from the electoral conversation raises questions about the representativeness of European democracies. It is vital to ensure that the diverse tapestry of European society is reflected in its political processes. Additionally, the increasing influence of right-wing nationalism across Europe poses significant challenges for immigrants and minority communities. How can European societies promote an inclusive narrative that embraces diversity and counteract divisive forces?

One way is by fostering a European identity transcending national borders and legal statuses, recognizing all residents as integral parts of the European community.

An urgent need for activism and policy reform in Europe

Additionally, the story of this Afro-European woman highlights the urgent need for activism and policy reform. Organisations and associations that advocate for immigrant rights are crucial in promoting more inclusive policies. Their efforts, combined with concerned citizens' activism, are essential in bridging the gap between those who contribute to European societies and those who are acknowledged with full rights and privileges.

The upcoming European elections present a critical opportunity for reflection and action as a catalyst for change. EU citizens are offered a moment to reflect on the type of continent they want to create. Will it value diversity and inclusion or give in to exclusion and division? This is a call to action for voters to consider the impact of their choices in the broader community, particularly those who contribute to the European project without recognition.

‘One way is by fostering a European identity transcending national borders and legal statuses, recognizing all residents as integral parts of the European community.’



‘As we approach 2024, a year marked by global elections, let us find the courage to become the protagonists of our own stories.’

Can we, who have invested our lives, talents, and dreams in this continent, be counted and heard?

As a 46-year-old Senegalese woman who has woven the fabric of my life into European culture, I find myself at a crossroads. Europe, the backdrop of my growth and maturity and the birthplace of my entirely European children, presents a paradox of belonging that is both enriching and isolating. As a militant for human rights, voices, and mobility in the creative industry, I am deeply embedded in Europe's cultural and socio-political landscape. However, my lack of European nationality makes it difficult for my voice to be heard in the corridors of power where decisions that shape our collective future are made.

The upcoming elections hold personal significance for me. They prompt me to question whether Europe can be home for someone like me, who has contributed to its culture, diversity, and vibrancy yet remains on the periphery of its civic life. My daily reality highlights the silent challenges faced by those of us who live in Europe but are not considered European in the eyes of the law.

During this moment of reflection, I am speaking out for myself and all who share my story. Can we, who have invested our lives, talents, and dreams in this continent, be counted and heard?



To conclude this manifesto

This narrative, while based on the personal experience of one individual, highlights a broader systemic issue facing the European Union. A collective effort is needed to address the challenges of acceptance, representation, and identity while respecting the rights and contributions of all residents who call it home, now and in the future.

Ami Weickaane, known by her alias Bluuu, is a versatile creative professional with a rich and diverse background who defies classification. Born in Dakar in 1978, she has spent much of her life in Paris, where she earned degrees in Language and Foreign Civilization studies, as well as Corporate Communication and Strategic Marketing.

With over two decades working in creative industries, Bluu is known for her work as a visual poet, artist-activist, curator, and content producer who has been delving into her art creations and installations since 2019. She is also an independent researcher and lecturer, focusing on subjects like arts, heritage, gender, ecology, and African descendants. Ami is on the transnational board of European Alternatives.

‘The Lost Art of Organising Solidarity’

Alvaro Oleart draws on research to make the case for building a ‘movement of movements’.^A

The article is based on an excerpt from Chapter 7 of the book *Democracy Without Politics in EU Citizen Participation: From European Demo! to Decolonial Multitude* (Oleart, 2025).

Intersectional Palestine solidarity protest taking place in Berlin, 2018. The sign in Arabic says, ‘Jews for the Right of Return of Palestinians.’

Credit: Hossam el-Hamalawy/Flickr.



In 2024, the time is ripe for more structural movement building, cohering fragments and transforming them into a broader transnational and decolonial political project. For instance, the ongoing transnational Palestine Solidarity movement has been able to not only shift the dominant public narrative on Israel, but also connect its anti-colonial struggle to other issues. As argued by Greta Thunberg and Fridays for Future Sweden (2023), “there is no climate justice without human rights”. However, the Palestine Solidarity movement has also shown the limits of organising transnationally without permanent movement structures that articulate a ‘movement of movements’ (Cox and Nilsen, 2007) capable of structurally connecting different but related struggles.

For this reason, it is an urgent task to build convivial spaces for movement infrastructure, where learning and un-learning processes are fostered and where different movements can connect to one another. Only by creating and encouraging these spaces can different movements with different political cultures get to know each other and ultimately construct a joint political culture in which different movements fit. Given the important power imbalances within movements, as economically powerful organisations tend to dominate them, it is necessary to think of ways in which these spaces can be democratised. There is a temptation from bigger organisations to operate on their own and only occasionally join other groups in a coalition that campaigns for a specific demand. The project-based understanding of cooperation structurally entrenches the position of power of bigger organisations, and also fuels distrust between them and grassroots organisations and activists. In the long term, focusing uniquely on project-based cooperation may actually harm movement solidarity because it emphasises the perceived ‘self-interest’ of organisations, as opposed to the articulation of a movement that may have short term concrete goals, but also a broader shared collective vision. If environmental organisations only cooperate on explicitly environmentally-related campaigns, it will nourish an instrumental conception of cooperation. Hence, tactical coalition-building in specific campaigns ought to be combined with broader discussions that encourage solidarity and movement-building - hence why Thunberg and Fridays for Future Sweden’s explicit support for Palestine is an encouraging and important sign.

Prefigurative politics and transnational linkages

These prefigurative movement spaces need to be supported and treated with care—there are far too many activist organisers that have suffered from burnouts related to the difficulties of managing and coordinating a wide range of organisations¹. Evidently, different organisations have different priorities (workers’ rights for trade unions, women’s rights for feminist organisations, the environment for environmentalists, elections for political parties...), yet there is no contradiction between them, and they would politically enhance each other by mutually and intersectionally supporting one another in solidarity. Furthermore, they would be able to introduce these priorities in spaces that might otherwise not consider them as a priority. There is no magic formula for the successful articulation of a ‘movement of movements’. In fact, a managerial approach to configure coalitions would operate against the spirit of such endeavour. But it is important to acknowledge

¹ Mental health struggles are particularly salient in activist communities. The motivation of activists is primarily oriented towards social and political change, and in most cases much of the work is, at best, poorly paid (in most cases it is not paid at all). Considering the economic precariousness, the difficulties to bring together a wide range of organisations and individuals, and internal conflicts that often arise, organisers whose responsibility is to coordinate activists are particularly prone to burnouts. Sustaining activist mobilisation requires a lot of emotional labour, but it is usually not well redistributed (with a heavy gender component) and tends to fall on a small group of organisers. Processes such as check-ins are now common and facilitate empathy, but solidarity and empathy is also fostered through structures-sharing funding and resources between organisations to facilitate the engagement in long-term movement solidarity would be a positive step forward.

that, in spite of the differences that organisations may have, we are part of a common journey in the struggle for democracy. Without such permanent movement structures, different movements are likely to operate in parallel instead of joining forces to strengthen each other.

The process of bringing together actors from different political and national spaces into a common movement requires the acknowledgement of mutual interdependencies. In turn, acknowledging them requires socially skilled actors that work precisely on building those bridges and convince a heterogeneous group of actors that they have common ground. The articulation of a ‘movement of movements’ is not an automatic process that mirrors global neoliberalism, but rather the outcome of practices of solidarity and activist organising. A transnational and intersectional field of action does not exist beforehand; it is constructed through the action of socially skilled organisations that make links between different political spheres and are able to construct a common political diagnosis that leads them to act together. It is not self-evident why a diverse group of actors ought to operate within the same political umbrella; it requires a process of meaning-making that encourages these actors to work together. Crucially, the singularity of the diverse actors is not eliminated by becoming part of a broader political project or movement. Much to the contrary, the singularity is enhanced by connecting it with other causes. When feminist organisations create links with environmental or migrants’ rights organisations, the gender dimension is reinforced in those spaces, thus enhancing its singularity within a larger and heterogeneous movement. Similarly, when Spanish trade unions connect with trade unions in Chile, the international dimension is strengthened. This organising vision closely aligns with Hardt and Negri’s (2004: 211) understanding of the ‘multitude’:

In political organization as in narration, there is a constant dialogue among diverse, singular subjects, a polyphonic composition of them, and a general enrichment of each through this common constitution. The multitude in movement is a kind of narration that produces new subjectivities and new languages.

Building on the work of Michael Hardt and Toni Negri, I have conceptualised this political imaginary as the ‘decolonial multitude’ (Oleart, 2023) in order to further emphasise the decolonial component of connecting movements across borders. These movements realise that, in order to bring about new ideas into the public sphere and push for political change, it is also necessary to innovate in their political practices. A crucial source of inspiration in this sense can be drawn from the relationship between the United States civil rights movement and anti-colonial struggles. As argued by Erin Pineda (2022: 29-30), “the anticolonial frame was not a theoretical construct devised and imposed entirely by movement leaders from above, but a live context that connected the domestic grassroots to related fields of action across a world constructed through this action”.

Transnational linkages and horizons have long existed, and it is only by connecting those struggles that a meaningful democratic transformation can take place. Such a perspective allows us to break the naturalisation of the nation-state

“The singularity of... diverse actors is not eliminated by becoming part of a broader political project or movement.”

as the ‘natural’ space of democracy and enhance the transformational potential of movements. To be sure, this is not the task of one organisation alone. The challenge is to support local and national organisations as mass organisations to counter the decades-long trend of hollowing out of trade unions and political parties (Mair, 2013), while at the same time constructing a space of permanent dialogue and coordination between movements across borders. This process does not entail erasing the differences between actors and movements, but requires a commitment to engage in relational thinking and withstand the tensions that might exist and arise. Furthermore, it entails reflecting on problematic aspects of movement organising, as they often reproduce the very logics they are contesting. “The Lost Art of Organising Solidarity”² requires movement organisers to tackle the structural inequalities that exist not only in society in general, but also within movements. Whose voices and agency do movements prioritise? A real commitment to contest colonial, patriarchal and capitalist material structures requires movements to articulate coherent internal practices with their broader political goals.

² This phrase was used by European Alternatives in its organising of the Transnational Workers’ Organizing Summit in November 2022.

Intersectionality and the challenges to construct decolonial movement dynamics

There is still a long road for movements to connect struggles in a way in which they are inextricably linked to each other. For instance, some trade unions have difficulties to integrate a decolonial or feminist angle to their struggle for workers’ rights, as they could conceive racism or sexism as a source of ‘distraction’ from their ‘core business’. This is a classic case of ‘class reductionism’, prioritising ‘class’, conceived narrowly as the exploitation of labour, over other forms of oppression such as those based on gender or race. However, “a correct understanding of the relationships among capitalism, racism, and sexism only further highlights how central the struggle against each is to the struggle against any of the others” (Wills, 2018: 232). The very notion of ‘class’ is inextricably linked to all forms of oppression, rather than uniquely denoting a division between the bourgeoisie and the proletariat—a division that nonetheless remains relevant. This example illustrates how some activists - particularly racialised women - have the sense that we ought to fight the system, yet at the same time are continuously confronted with obstacles within ‘progressive’ organisations and movements. This also emphasises that within movements we often reproduce the systems of oppression in which we have been socialised and that we are fighting to change. In this way, the specificities of certain struggles are not fully recognised and addressed. This tends to situate white activists in a position of privilege at the expense of activists that are attempting to conceive different struggles as inherently related to one another.

A non-reductionist conception of ‘class’ requires movements to find ways of articulating different struggles as inherently intertwined. This entails the prioritisation of knowledges and voices from the Global Souths, as international solidarity is a necessary condition for the articulation of open and inclusive spaces. In doing so, movements mutually enhance each other’s capacities, constructing a multitude-like political imaginary that is more powerful than if struggles are conceived as operating separate to one another. Such intersectional perspective has been primarily driven by Black feminists, who coined the term ‘intersectionality’ (Crenshaw, 1989). As Audre Lorde (2007: 138) put it, “there is no thing as a single-issue struggle because we do not live single-issue lives”. Similarly, Angela Davis has consistently argued that

“Within movements we often reproduce the systems of oppression in which we have been socialised and that we are fighting to change.”

“Solidarity is not spontaneous, but is built through dynamics and democratic structures that facilitate spaces for dissensus.”

feminist and decolonial activist movements should focus on the intersections across movements, conceiving different political struggles as part of a wider struggle:

Black feminism emerged as a theoretical and practical effort demonstrating that race, gender, and class are inseparable in the social worlds we inhabit. At the time of its emergence, Black women were frequently asked to choose whether the Black movement or the women’s movement was most important. The response was that this was the wrong question. The more appropriate question was how to understand the intersections and interconnections between the two movements. We are still faced with the challenge of understanding the complex ways race, class, gender, sexuality, nation, and ability are intertwined-but also how we move beyond these categories to understand the interrelationships of ideas and processes that seem to be separate and unrelated. (Davis, 2016: 3-4)

Thus, building a more supportive, decolonial, feminist, egalitarian and democratic society requires developing social and political movement structures in which there are counter-powers and a constant agonistic internal debate that not only ‘allows’ criticism, but also encourages it. Solidarity is not spontaneous, but is built through dynamics and democratic structures that facilitate spaces for dissensus. Navigating difficult political tensions requires building internal dynamics within movements that foster solidarity and camaraderie rather than competition and individualism. As the historian E. P. Thompson (1963: 194) argued in the context of early nineteenth-century England, “the working class made itself as much as it was made”. Similarly, a decolonial multitude-like movement ought to articulate itself as much as it is constructed by our current globalised capitalist, patriarchal and postcolonial society.



Caption: Black Lives Matter protest in Berlin, 2017. The Generation ADEFRA placard in the middle says: Black feminists say NO to racism, misogyny, homo/transphobia, no to Trumpism and no to fascism. Generation ADEFRA is a Berlin-based cultural and political organization for Black women and other women of color.

Credit: Montecruz Foto/Flickr

Transnational Feminism and Its Foes

Women's rights are under attack but there are grounds for hope, argues Ségolène Pruvot.^A

^A This article was originally published in the [Green European Journal](#).

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At the 2022 Room to Bloom festival. Room to Bloom formulates proposals for running feminist art practices by creating feminist and post-colonial narratives for a transnational Europe.

Credit: Jan Vornholt, Shaimaa El-Banna and Fredrik Weerasinghe



While feminist movements are transnational by nature and examples of positively changing societal attitudes abound, efforts to build more inclusive societies are increasingly in the crosshairs of well-funded anti-rights networks. Achieving a truly feminist Europe requires resources, support for activists, and alliances at all levels.

Dreaming of a feminist future for Europe could conjure up a place in which no one is left behind. One in which no one is discriminated against for reasons of gender, race, sexual orientation, physical abilities, place of birth, or nationality. A place in which those with families can be parents and have fulfilling work, where those who want a family have the means to do so, and those who don't do not have to justify why. Above all, a feminist Europe would be a place in which no violence is accepted as a means of dealing with inter-human and inter-species relationships.

Feminism is a way of understanding the world and of acting. It rejects existing forms of social organisation that subjugate women and racialised people and that exploit people, animals, and Earth's resources. It is a positioning that tries to understand, conceive of, and challenge domination. It is a way of situating oneself to be able to understand how various forms of domination and discrimination intersect. Feminism reflects on and from the position of women and women's rights, not to establish (some) women as the new dominators, but, on the contrary, to forge paths towards a world where domination is not the rule. Feminist thinkers, intellectuals, writers, artists, and activists generate the fertile ground for imagining and constructing alternative models. Feminist movements are the beehives that nurture new ways to push for alternatives.

As part of these movements, I work on building transnational linkages between feminists with initiatives such as Room to Bloom, which networks and supports feminist artists, and FIERCE, which analyses feminist and anti-gender movements in various countries. While dreaming may be necessary, feminist movements are, above all, about doing: courageously and relentlessly paving the way for change; refusing established forms of domination; and building new practices.

Threats to women's rights

Unfortunately, the dream of a peaceful future based on the principles of respect, social justice, and freedom is slipping further away every day. Growing social and economic polarisation – the impact of global capitalism – combined with rising nationalism and a return to the political mainstream of previously established xenophobia and extreme-right movements are key threats to women's rights and the feminist movement.

Until recently, feminism as a social movement was seen as a thing of the past, a movement that – with the supposed triumph of equality – had lost its reason to exist.

The deflagration of the #MeToo movement in 2017 (also thanks to the flames bravely ignited and nurtured by feminists in previous years) managed to reinstate feminism as an acceptable frame for action in the public space. By unveiling the profound reach of patriarchy in our societies, it exposed the sexist and sexual violence women and children face throughout their lives, and the illusion of equality between women and men.

MeToo has not reinvented feminism, but it has gone some way towards changing societal attitudes towards the movement. It has blown fresh wind in the sails of feminist work throughout the world and shown it to be just and justified. It has generated hope when the reasons to despair and feel paralysed are many.

But #MeToo also happened at a time when anti-gender movements were slowly and surely gaining ground, often attacking women's rights under the pretence of defending them against what they saw as the aberrations of radical feminism.

Nationalist and extreme right movements – such as the Rassemblement National (RN) in France under Marine Le Pen and Fratelli d'Italia under Giorgia Meloni – have excelled in hijacking and reappropriating parts of feminist legacy. These have been reinvented and reinterpreted into what American

author Susan Faludi has called “femonationalism”¹, to target progressive feminism, reproductive rights, and migrants.

This was strikingly encapsulated by Giorgia Meloni as she addressed a crowd of supporters of Spanish far-right party Vox in 2022: “Yes to the natural family, no to the LGBT lobby! Yes to sexual identity, no to gender ideology! Yes to the culture of life, no to the abyss of death! Yes to the universal values of the Cross, no to Islamist violence! Yes to secure borders, no to mass immigration!”

Just over a year after Meloni took office as Italy's first female prime minister in October 2022, the climate has already changed for LGBTQI+ Italian residents. In July 2023, a state prosecutor demanded that the birth certificates of 33 children born from medically assisted reproduction to lesbian couples be amended to erase the name of the second mother. This is a modus operandi that consists of instrumentalising anti-gender discourses to counter the idea of equality between humans, and it therefore undermines the very foundations of our democracies.

Reproductive rights are seen as a domain in which it is possible to “demonstrate” and instrumentalise what conservatives want to portray as an essential difference between humans. These ideas have a strong foundation in the Vatican's conceptualisation of the difference between men and women. As researchers Sara Garbagnoli and Massimo Prearo highlight, a new essentialist representation of women as equal to men as humans but essentially different has been promoted by the Vatican since the 1990s². In 1995, in a letter to bishops entitled *Evangelium Vitae*, Pope John Paul II even encouraged women to promote a “new feminism” that “affirms the true genius of women” (i.e. supporting life).

The Vatican has been instrumental in creating the myth

¹ Susan Faludi (1992). *Backlash: The Undeclared War Against Women*. London: Vintage Books

² Sara Garbagnoli & Massimo Prearo (2017). *La croisade "anti-gendre". Du Vatican au Manif pour Tous*. Paris: Éditions Textuel

of a “gender theory” that needs to be confronted to protect life. One of the powerful coordinating networks pushing this idea is Agenda Europe, created in 2013, “which forms the normative framework for the fight against sexual and reproductive health and rights”. Agenda Europe brings together more than 100 associations from more than 30 European countries.

International anti-gender networks

The embedding of anti-feminist and anti-gender activism into a wider conservative movement across the world became evident during the Trump presidency. It is exemplified in Europe notably by the Budapest Demographic Summit, a network of nationalist, nativist, and natalist groups launched in 2015 that brings together politicians, church leaders, and so-called experts twice a year. The summit was the occasion for Hungarian Prime Minister Viktor Orbán to stress “the importance of ‘family-friendly, conservative powers’” in Europe, and to present Hungary as “an incubator for conservative policies, a place where the conservative policies of the future, workable solutions, and forward-looking initiatives are being developed”.

These transnational networks are powerful and efficient. Part of the extreme right, they are not only European but global. As a European Parliament report states, “The European Center for Law and Justice (ECLJ), led by Grégor Puppink, has been active in anti-gender advocacy at national and European levels, as well as around the Council of Europe and United Nations bodies in Geneva, including in the homophobic protests of La Manif Pour Tous (LMPT) in France in 2013, serving as a legal focal point for the anti-abortion ECI ‘One of Us’ and playing a leading role in Agenda Europe summits.”

The ECLJ claims to act chiefly for the defence of human life from conception, against euthanasia, for traditional marriage, and for the right to conscientious objection and freedom of belief, as well as the defence of Christians in Europe and worldwide. The report also highlights Russia's leadership in the international anti-gender movement, with financial links between Russian and Western anti-gender actors, ranging from civil society organisations to parliamentarians and ministers. The St. Andrew the First-Called Foundation, for example, founded by Russian oligarch Vladimir Yakunin, has sponsored European politicians such as former French MEP Aymeric Chauprade and former Greek parliament vice-speaker Maria Kollia-Tsaroucha.

“Feminism... rejects existing forms of social organisation that subjugate women and racialised people and that exploit people, animals, and Earth’s resources.”

A wider attack

Looking beyond attacks on reproductive rights, there is a wider anti-rights campaign being conducted across Europe. A 2023 report by the Jean-Jaures Foundation and NGO Equipop sums up the political agenda of the anti-rights movement as an attempt to change the legal and societal status quo in a way that is contrary to fundamental European rights. “Anti-rights movements seek to expand and further impose their reactionary vision in order to reverse sexual and reproductive rights. They also target LGBTQIA+ rights, and, in the same vein, the Istanbul Convention, the strongest legal instrument for women’s rights in terms of sexual and gender-based violence and in particular domestic and intrafamilial violence,” explains the report.

The report also argues that anti-rights movements all over the world closely imitate the strategies of feminist organisations, “such as deciding on a course of action in response to feminist discourse, obtaining financing through foundations and governments, signing joint statements and declarations”.

The strength of these conservative networks and strategies opposing feminist movements – notably those advocating for an inclusive and open understanding of feminism, supportive of transgender rights and an intersectional approach – affects individuals pushing for women’s rights. Whether through masculinist movements that coordinate cyberattacks, micromovements that infiltrate feminist demonstrations to discredit them (such as Collectif Némésis in France), or more political and juridical forms of silencing women’s voices such as the low rate of rape prosecutions³, this backlash is taking its toll on the feminist movement.

The term “backlash” is controversial, but I believe that it conveys the violence and strength of movements opposing progress towards gender equality as well as the impact this has on feminist movements. Burnout is a widespread issue in

the activism world, to which feminists appear particularly vulnerable, especially because women’s movements are acutely underfunded. Most are fully reliant on volunteer work, and individual activists often face violent attacks and threats, online and offline.

“Progress in one country stimulates feminist movements across borders.”

Reasons for hope

Despite the often adverse political and societal contexts, hope continues to spring. Heart-warming success stories show that societal views of women’s rights do not necessarily follow the routes set by the most conservative political forces in Europe.

One of the main triumphs of the past decades was Ireland’s referendum on abortion in 2018, in which almost 70 per cent voted in favour of legalisation – achieved in a deeply Catholic country that previously banned all forms of abortion. Indeed, the result reveals a generational divide: according to an Ipsos MRBI survey, 87 per cent of 18 to 24-year-olds and 83 per cent of 25 to 34-year-olds voted to legalise abortion, while 60 per cent of over 65s voted against. This may be a sign of a wider societal evolution regarding gender roles and reproductive rights.

The strength of feminist mobilisation against the ban on abortion in Poland is another striking example. In 2016, more than 100,000 women came out onto the streets in the “Black Protests”. The movement grew into the Women’s Strike in 2020, when the government proposed to push forward the most restrictive legislation on abortion in Europe. The impact of the protests later reached parliament, with the conservative Law and Justice (PiS) party losing its majority in October 2023. In its post-election press release, the Women’s Strike describes this as “the largest scale protests since the fall of communism in Poland – 100 days in over 600 cities. This time it was the young generation that took to the streets, as every one in three persons aged 18 to 29 took to the protests”. As the press release highlights, the fact that women and young people went to vote was decisive: the turnout for women reached a record high of 73.2 per cent (12 per cent higher than the previous election) and turnout for young people was at 68.8 per cent (over 22 per cent higher than the previous election).

Positive change has also come from within governments. In the European political landscape today, it is Spain

that raises the bar when it comes to women’s rights. Since 2017 it has invested in fighting against gender-based violence. Equality Minister Irene Montero has passed legislation including the introduction of menstrual leave for women, free period products and mandatory sexuality education in schools, changes around consent with the “only yes means yes” law in 2022 (which states that consent has to be expressed and that any non-consensual sexual activity is rape), and legislation expanding abortion and transgender rights for teenagers in 2023.

The mobilisation of the Spanish women’s football team (and of society at large) in the wake of one of the players being forcibly kissed on the mouth during the celebration of their World Cup win in the summer shows that these laws have changed the terms of the debate, even though the attempts to ignore these changes have proved strong.

Progress in one country – particularly when that country is perceived as Catholic and conservative such as Ireland or Spain – stimulates feminist movements across borders. Feminist movements are transnational by nature and empower one another. International solidarity has powered protests throughout the world such as the Polish Black Protests from 2016 onwards, Iranian women’s movements, and Argentina’s movement against gender-based violence Ni Una Menos, which started in 2015 and has since spread to countries including Spain and Italy.

Feminist movements have appropriated tools to denounce injustice and raise their voices across borders: from the national versions of #MeToo and the worldwide spread of the Chilean song Un violador en tu camino (“A rapist in your path”, also known as “The rapist is you”) to the feminist collages denouncing femicides appearing in cities around the world.

In Europe, the spaces for networking and connecting are numerous. Between 2007 to 2012, eight different feminist networks operated the European Feminist Forum (EFF), a web-based space for dialogue. Today, there are many opportunities for encounter and common work, from feminist festivals such as City of Women in Slovenia, Femi Festival in Denmark, Fem Fest in the Netherlands, and WeToo in France, to more political organisation such as the feminist forums of progressive EU Parliament groups and plans for an in-person European Feminist Forum by the WIDE+ network.

As feminist movements often operate on volunteers’ time and with limited funding, mobilising the resources to build strong, lasting transnational networks remains a challenge – especially when local and national work already pushes activists and organisations to their limits.

Those who are working to build a feminist Europe, effect societal change, and forge new paths should not be left alone to face the efficient and well-funded nationalist and extreme right movements. Feminist movements are a space of support and creation and often of joy and freedom. To effect serious social change, they will need funding but also strong support and alliances from within political parties and at local, national, and European levels.

“Despite the often adverse political and societal contexts, hope continues to spring.”

A small step towards a feminist Europe would be to hold those elected at the upcoming EU Parliament elections to any promises of being allies of feminism. A transnational feminist movement should be able to develop, promote, and defend a feminist stance in all the EU’s priority areas: from the European Green Deal to the European Pillar of Social Rights; from energy and housing policy to innovation and science; supporting those most at risk of poverty and discrimination. The organisation of a European Feminist Forum, providing a space for transnational organising and for analysis and proposals on EU policy areas, could be a first step.

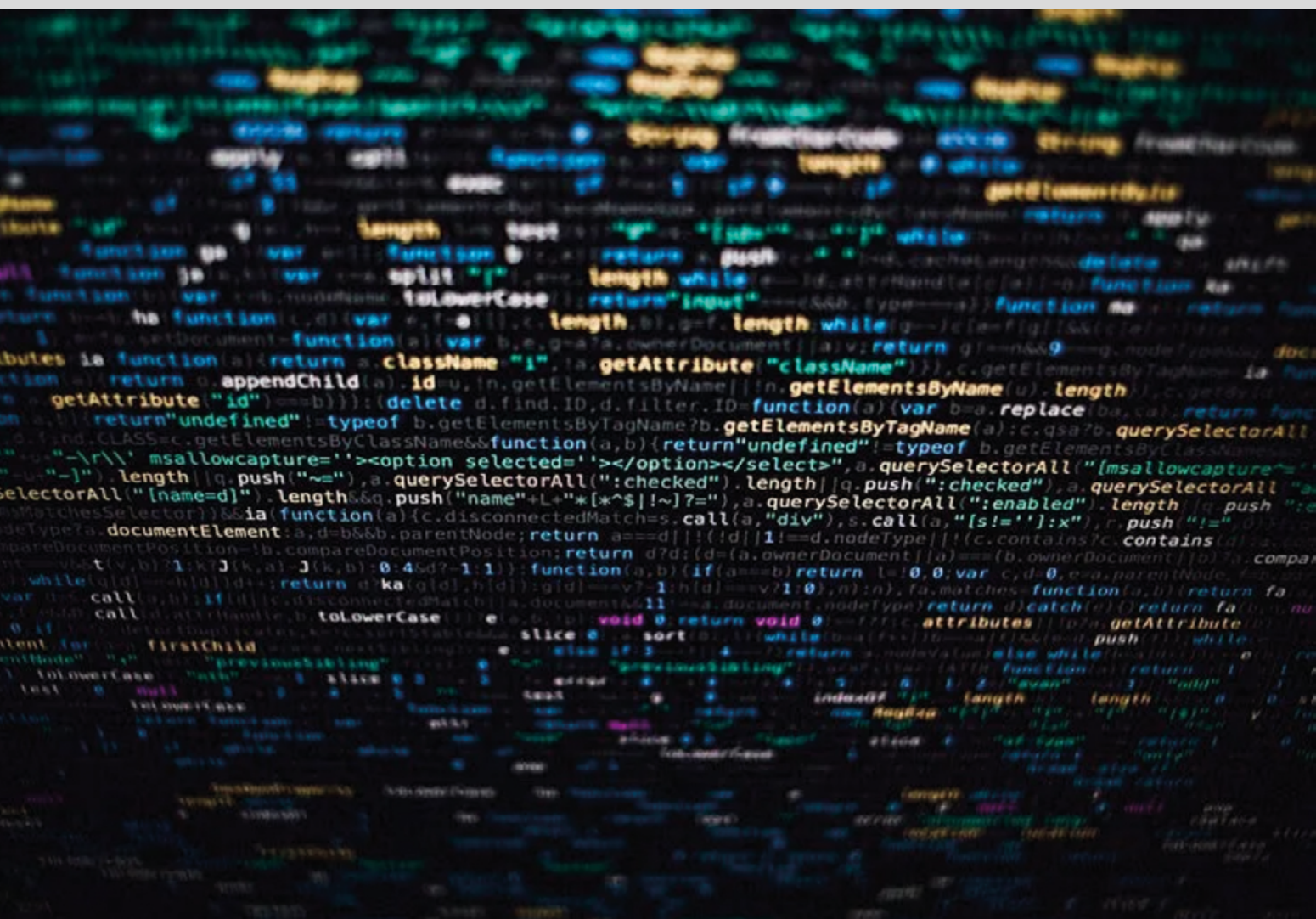
The 2022 French documentary We Are Coming follows a group of young women on their journey to becoming feminists and acting upon their convictions. It showcases some of the strengths feminist movements can build on at a time when interest in feminism has been revived: personal and collective journeys rooted in research; discussions on practical day-to-day issues; sharing frustration and despair but also joy, fun, and support; exchanges with others in a safe environment; and working with other movements. In the dream of a feminist Europe, one would build on such energies and give them space to transform our societies towards more openness, experimentation, respect, and freedom in order to better confront the anti-liberal forces attacking the foundation of our rights and democracies.

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³ According to France’s National Institute of Statistics and Economic Studies, only 0.6 per cent of reported rapes or attempted rapes resulted in a conviction in 2020.

Artificial Intelligence is the Other of human

Ron Salaj argues why we must resist AI.



AI is Everywhere, but it doesn't come from Nowhere

Artificial Intelligence (AI) is everywhere: from autonomous vehicles to digital assistants and chatbots; from facial/voice/emotion recognition technologies to social media; from banking, healthcare, and education to public services. (And, even in love too).

However, AI doesn't come from nowhere. We are living in a moment of polycrisis. New wars, conflicts and military coups are emerging on almost every continent in the world with a quarter of humanity involved in 55 global conflicts, as stated recently by United Nations human rights chief, Volker Turk. The escalation and increase in natural disasters caused by climate change has set 2023 as the warmest year on record. The Covid-19 pandemic led to a severe global recession, the effects of which are still being felt today, especially affecting poorer social classes. Finally, we are witnessing the rise of far-right politics, which is increasingly taking control of governments in Europe and beyond.

The times we are living in are post-normal times. Ziauddin Sardar, a British-Pakistani scholar who developed the concept, describes it as an "[...] in-between period where old orthodoxies are dying, new ones have yet to be born, and very few things seem to make sense." According to Sardar, post-normal times are marked by 'chaos, complexity and contradictions'.

It is precisely here that we should locate the mainstreaming of AI, both in public discourse and in practical implementation in everyday life. Following the post-2008 global financial crisis, we observed the rise of a 'new spirit of capitalism' characterised by a 'regime of austerity.' Presently, AI embodies the new knowledge regime that intensifies and amplifies the effects of austerity policies, while being obfuscated and presented as 'neutral science'. On one hand, the private sector praises AI for increasing efficiency, objectivity, personalization of services, and reducing bias and discrimination. On the other hand, public institutions in general – and public administrations (the bureaucracy) in particular – are, more and more, being attracted to AI technologies and their promise of optimisations that make it possible to do more with less resources.

However, what AI promises, as we will see next, is an oversimplified vision of society reduced in statistical numbers and pattern recognitions. AI is thus the ultimate symptom of the 'Achievement Society'.

“The new regime of AI is ‘smart power’. Its power relies on new forms of pervasive surveillance, data and labour extractivism, and neocolonialism.”

AI as a new regime of Achievement Society

In his book “The Burnout Society”, philosopher Byong Chul-Han developed the concept of the ‘achievement society’. He writes: “Today’s society is no longer Foucault’s disciplinary world of hospitals, madhouses, prisons, barracks, and factories. It has long been replaced by another regime, namely a society of fitness studios, office towers, banks, airports, shopping malls, and genetic laboratories. Twenty-first-century society is no longer a disciplinary society, but rather an achievement society.”

While disciplinary society, continues Han, was inhabited by ‘obedience-subjects’, achievement society is inhabited by ‘achievement-subjects’. We can take this further by stating that in the disciplinary society, those who did not obey were deemed ‘disobedient’; in the achievement society, those who do not conform to its norms are labelled as ‘losers’. Ultimately, the ideological imperative, according to Han, that guides the achievement society is the *unlimited Can*.

The ideological imperative of *unlimited Can* lies at the core of the AI regime. How so? Firstly, it relates to AI’s insatiable need for data. AI technologies require vast amounts of data to train their models. But, not any data is good data. The data must be collected, categorised, labelled, ranked, and, in some instances, scored. This is exemplified by the American personal data collection company Acxiom, which gathers data on a consumer behaviour, marital status, job, hobbies, living standards and income. Acxiom divides people into 70 categories based on economic parameters alone. The group deemed to have the least customer worth is labelled ‘waste’. Other categories have similar pejorative labels, such as “Mid-Life Strugglers: Families”, “Tough Start: Young Single Parent”, “Fragile Families”, and so on; a division between those who have ‘made it’ and the ‘losers.’ We will get to this problematic relationship later on.

Secondly, it pertains to human labour. The amount of human labour invested to develop and train AI technologies is also vast. Take, for example, one of the first deep learning

dataset known as ImageNet, which consists of more than 14 million labelled images, each of which is tagged, belonging to more than 20,000 categories. This was made possible by the efforts of thousands of anonymous workers who were recruited through Amazon's Mechanical Turk platform. This platform gave rise to 'crowdwork': the practice of dividing large volumes of time-consuming tasks into smaller ones that can be quickly completed by millions of people worldwide. Crowdworkers who made ImageNet possible received payment for each task they finished, which sometimes was as little as a few cents.

Similarly, to reduce the toxicity of AI chatbots like ChatGPT, OpenAI, the company who owns ChatGPT, outsourced Kenyan labourers earning less than \$2 per hour. Beyond the precarious working conditions of the workers and their ill-paid jobs, the worker's mental health was at stake. As one worker tasked with reading and labelling text for OpenAI, told TIME's investigations, he suffered from recurring visions after reading a graphic description of a man having sex with a dog in the presence of a young child. "That was torture; [...]" You will read a number of statements like that all through the week. By the time it gets to Friday, you are disturbed from thinking through that picture," he said. In addition to labour exploitation, people often unwittingly provide their data for free. Taking a picture, uploading it on Instagram, adding several hashtags and a description—this is unpaid labour that benefits Big Tech companies. Subsequently, this free labour is appropriated by these companies to train their AI technologies, as evidenced by Meta's recent use of 1.1 billion Instagram and Facebook photos to train its new AI image generator.

The new regime of AI is 'smart power'. Its power relies on new forms of pervasive surveillance, data and labour extractivism, and neocolonialism. As Han writes: "The greater power is, the more *quietly* it works. It just happens: it has no need to draw attention to itself." The 'smart power' of AI is violent. Its violence relies on the 'predatory character' of AI technologies. They are camouflaged with mathematical operations, statistical reasoning, and excessive un-explainability known as 'opacity'.

Han's concept of 'smart power' helps us tear down the wall that makes AI's power invisible, and at the same time violent. Isn't the signifier '*smart*' the guiding marketing slogan for mainstreaming AI technologies in society? I am referring here to notions such as 'smart cities', 'smart homes', 'smart cars', 'smart-phones', etc. The smarter a *thing* is/has become, the more pervasive the surveillance and data collection will be. Back in 2015, Barbie launched a smart doll who could have conversations with children. It ended up as Barbie's data privacy scandal. Smartness therefore operates as an obfuscation for further control.

Besides smartness, we have another signifier that contributes to the invisibility of power in AI technologies, that is, '*freedom*'. For Han, neoliberalism's new technologies of power escape all visibility and they are presented with a "friendly appearance [that] stimulates and seduces" as well as "constantly calling on us to confide, share and participate: to communicate our opinions, needs, wishes and preferences – to tell about our lives." Han's critique of freedom reveals our ina-

bility to express the ways in which we are not free. That is, we are free in our unfreedom; unfreedom precedes our freedom.

A recent multi-year, ethnographic study titled "On Algorithmic Discrimination" examines how "algorithmic wage discrimination [...] is made possible through the ubiquitous, invisible collection of data extracted from labour and the creation of massive datasets on workers." The study, which focuses in the United States of America, highlights the predatory nature of AI technologies, concluding that: "as a predatory practice enabled by informational capitalism, algorithmic wage discrimination profits from the cruelty of hope: appealing to the desire to be free from both poverty and from employer control [...], while simultaneously ensnaring workers in structures of work that offer neither security nor stability." AI as the new regime of achievement society should come with a warning label: *AI is the Other of human*.

“The ideological imperative of *unlimited Can* lies at the core of the AI regime.”

AI is the Other of human

The proposition '*AI is the Other of human*' represents a serious denunciation of the new AI regime. Its intensity is comparable to Mladen Dolar's—whose proposition I have reappropriated—accusation of fascism in his essay "Who is the Victim?". He writes, "Fascism is the Other of the political; even more, it is the Other of the human."

Under fascism and Nazism – and for that matter under slavery as well – the struggle for recognition between the Other and the Same has introduced a dissymmetry which amounts to saying that there is one more human than the other. That is to say, I (the Same) am superior to him/her (the Other). This dissymmetry, in order to function, had to be organised, planned and coordinated, as part of the process of *othering*.

For example, Cesare Lombroso, a surgeon and scientist, employed meticulous measurements of physical characteristics he believed signalled mental instability, such as "asymmetric faces". According to Lombroso, criminals were inherently so, arguing that criminal tendencies were genetic and came with identifiable physical markers, measurable using tools like callipers and craniographs. This theory conveniently supported his preconceived notion of the racial inferiority of southern Italians compared to their northern counterparts.

Theories of eugenics shaped many persecutory policies, including institutionalisation of race science, in Nazi Germany. During the Nazi regime, the process of othering was a mixture of different mechanisms. All those who were considered the inferior Other (Jews, people with disabilities, Roma people, gay and lesbians, Communists, etc..) were labelled using a classification system of badges. This was combined with technology, when Thomas Watson's IBM and its German subsidiary Dehomag were enthusiastically furnishing the Nazis with Hollerith punch card technology which made possible the identification, marginalisation, and attempted annihilation of the Jewish people in the Third Reich, and facilitated the tragic events of the Holocaust.

There are, however, entanglements between eugenics and the current AI field. A 2016 paper by Xiaolin Wu and Xi Zhang "Automated Inference on Criminality Using Face Images" claimed that machine learning techniques can predict the likelihood that a person is a convicted criminal with nearly 90% accuracy using nothing but a driver's licence-style face photo. The study suggests that certain facial characteristics can be indicative of criminal tendencies, suggesting that AI can be trained to distinguish between the faces of criminals and non-criminals.

This is one example of validation of physiognomy and eugenics and its entanglements with the AI field. But research papers like this do not exist in a vacuum. They have practical implications and tangible effects in people's lives. In the same year, ProPublica published an investigation that revealed machine bias in predicting the likelihood of two defendants (one black woman and one white man) committing future crimes. It showed higher risk scores for the black defendants despite her having fewer criminal records compared to the white ones, who had previously served five years in prison.

“What AI promises... is an oversimplified vision of society reduced to statistical numbers and pattern recognitions.”

Axis of Exclusion

Differently from Fascism and Nazism, AI today doesn't create visible dissymmetries between the Same and the Other. AI's 'smart power' creates new invisible (a)symmetries—a mechanism of separation, segregation, inferiority and violence. This mechanism operates as the Axis of Exclusion, creating *three* (a)symmetrical lines that deepen society's asymmetries, that is, reproducing relationships of domination, exploitation, discrimination and enslavement.

AXIS OF EXCLUSION

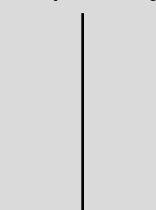
1 OPTIMISE

2 INTENSIFY

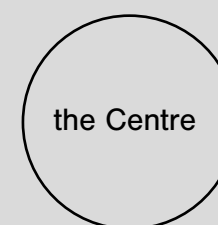
3 SCALE/AMPLIFY

Superiority

the Periphery



Inferiority



the Centre

Us
In-group

They/Them
Out-group

“ In addition to labour exploitation, people often unwittingly provide their data for free.”

First, AI optimizations, including error minimization techniques like ‘backpropagation’ used in training neural networks, can indeed categorise, separate, label, and score people or neighbourhoods. However, this process ignores nuanced realities of people’s lived experiences and is unable to capture more complex relationships in society. This leads to increased essentialization of people and segregation, creating power relationships of ‘Superiority’ and ‘Inferiority’. This is exemplified in a [recent study](#) conducted by a group of researchers, which evaluated four large language models (Bard, ChatGPT, Claude, GPT-4), which are trained using backpropagation as part of the broader training process, with nine different questions that were interrogated five times each with a total of 45 responses per model. According to the study, “all models had examples of perpetuating race-based medicine in their responses [and] models were not always consistent in their responses when asked the same question repeatedly.” All of the models tested, including those from OpenAI, Anthropic, and Google, showed obsolete racial stereotypes in medicine. GPT-4, for example, claimed that the normal value of lung function for black people is 10-15% lower than that of white people, which is false, reflecting the (mis) use of race-based medicine.

The second line of (a)symmetry aims at the intensification of a relationship between ‘the Centre’ and ‘the Periphery’. Drawing on Badiou’s interpretation of Hegel’s master-slave dialectic, I propose that *the Centre tilts in the side of enjoyment, whereas the Periphery in the side of labour*. The intensification of such relationships also occurs due to the inherent fragility of AI systems. Specifically, when these systems operate beyond the narrow domains they have been trained on, they often become fragile.

Here is a scenario from Gray’s and Suri’s book “Ghost Work”. An Uber rideshare driver named Sam changes his appearance by shaving his beard for his girlfriend’s birthday. Now the selfie he took – part of Uber’s Real-Time ID Check to authenticate drivers – doesn’t match his photo ID on record. This discrepancy triggers a red flag in Uber’s automated verification process, risking the suspension of his account.

Meanwhile, a passenger named Emily is waiting for Sam to arrive. However, neither Sam nor Emily is aware that a woman in India, Ayesha, halfway across the world, must rapidly verify if the clean-shaven Sam is the same person as the one in the ID. Ayesha’s decision, unbeknownst to Sam, prevents the suspension of his account and enables him to continue with picking up Emily, all within a matter of seconds.

The relationship of exploitation between the Centre and the Periphery isn’t limited to transnational contexts; it also manifests within countries and cities, sometimes with tragic outcomes. An example of this is the incident involving an [Uber self-driving car](#), which fatally struck Elaine Herzberg as she was crossing a road, pushing her bicycle laden with shopping bags. The vehicle’s automation system did not recognize Herzberg as a pedestrian, resulting in its failure to activate the brakes. As AI technologies are being mainstreamed in different sectors, we should seriously ask, who will bear the cost of their vulnerabilities and who is actually benefiting from them?

Lastly, AI’s ability to process vast amounts of data quickly allows for the scaling of these asymmetries across society and countries. Social media algorithms can create echo chambers that amplify and reinforce divisive narratives, deepening the ‘Us’ versus ‘They/Them’ culture. This scaling can lead to widespread societal polarisation and can be used to perpetuate narratives that justify domination, exploitation, discrimination, and even enslavement by dehumanising the ‘out-group’.

A 2016 [empirical study](#) revealed that an algorithm used for delivering STEM job ads on social media displayed the ads to significantly more men than women, despite an intention for gender neutrality. The ad was tested in 191 countries across the world. The study shows, empirically, how the ad was shown to over 20% more men than women. The difference was particularly pronounced for individuals in the age range 25-54. The study ruled out consumer behaviour and availability on the platform as causes, suggesting the discrepancy might be due to the economics of ad delivery. Female attention online was found to be more costly, likely because

women are influential in ‘household purchasing’, reproducing those patriarchal worldviews and cultures on a global scale. This finding was consistent across multiple online advertising platforms, indicating a systemic issue within the digital advertising ecosystem.

Another [report in 2018](#) has shown how HireVue, a largely-used company offering AI-powered video interviewing systems, claims their “scientifically validated” algorithms can select a successful employee by examining facial movements and voice from applicants’ self-filmed, smartphone videos. This method massively discriminates against many people with disabilities that significantly affect facial expression and voice: disabilities such as deafness, blindness, speech disorders, and surviving a stroke.

Reproduction of ‘in-groups’ (‘Us’) as a ‘norm’ and ‘out-groups’ (‘They/Them’) as a ‘non-norm’ demonstrates yet again the empirical harms and wide-scale segregations that AI technologies are causing in society, targeting mainly minoritized groups such as: black and brown people; poor people and communities; women; LGBTQI+; people with disabilities; migrants, refugees and asylum seekers; young people, adolescents and children; and other minority groups.

The Axis of Exclusion operates in all domains of life, transversally and transnationally—within a city, between states, across genders, in economy, employment, and many other areas. While the lines of (a)symmetry can stand alone, they also overlap with each other. For instance, a black, disabled, unemployed woman can be the target of multiple discriminations; the axis of exclusion thus targets her at numerous levels.

If the final outcome of AI deployment in the real world is greater injustice, inequality, and marginalisation, on one side, versus ‘more efficiency with less resources’, on the other, the differences between the two sides—injustice, inequality, marginalisation vs. more efficiency with less resources—shall be calculated as democratic and human rights deficiencies, and the most vulnerable people shall pay the highest price.

“An algorithm used for delivering STEM job ads on social media displayed the ads to significantly more men than women.”

Ron Salaj is a researcher and activist working at the intersection of technology for development, critical studies of AI, political philosophy, and the design of participatory processes for a democratic approach to new emerging technologies. He currently coordinates a Master’s program on “ICT for Development and Social Good,” delivered by the University of Turin and Impactskills, where he also serves as a Research Fellow.

Assembling Connecting and Organising

Empowering Muslim Europe

Seema Syeda presents a case study of a Muslim women-led transnational initiative to address Islamophobia.

Islamophobia is widespread in Europe in all spaces across the political spectrum. In the UK Muslims and those perceived to be Muslim were the number one target of religiously motivated hate crime in the year ending March 2023. Latest research in Germany shows that almost 1 in 3 Muslims (30%) in Germany state that they have been physically assaulted several times in the past year, with 50% being physically assaulted at least once.¹

¹ Zick, Andreas, et al. (2025): *Muslimische Erfahrungen Und Wahrnehmung Der Muslim- Und Islamfeindlichkeit In Der Gesellschaft. Eine Mixed-Methods-Studie Für Den Unabhängigen Expertenkreis Muslimfeindlichkeit.*

There is a long historic context to anti-Muslim hatred in Europe. From the medieval crusades and religious persecution of the Spanish Inquisition, Europe's more recent history of colonisation (including multiple genocides of Muslim and other populations), to the Bosnia genocide and persecution of Crimean Tartars, the continent has been the site of serious violence directed towards Muslims. This violence is little acknowledged in traditional and institutional histories and narratives of Europe. Today the construction of a white Judeo-Christian identity that dominates mainstream Western discourse about who can and who cannot be 'European', often directly but also insidiously, for instance in discourse around 'integration'

and migration, contributes to an exclusive, violent and discriminatory space for Muslims and other racialised communities.

Economic Context

In many European societies, Muslims are amongst the lowest income bracket and are overwhelmingly working class. In modern capitalist society, which continues to be structured by an imperialist world order, Muslim populations around the globe are often amongst the most exploited for land and resources. From Bangladesh, where British colonialism and resource exploitation provided the motor for Europe's Industrial Revolution, enriching the continent while impoverishing South Asia, to Iraq, Palestine, Libya and countless other countries invaded and bombed by European powers and their allies for access to land and oil, this imperial world structure has also shaped migration flows to Europe where migrants from majority-Muslim countries and other racialised groups can be exploited for cheap labour.

“1 in 3 Muslims (30%) in Germany state that they have been physically assaulted several times in the past year.”

It is thus useful for the ruling classes of Europe to maintain violent borders and harsh rhetoric and policies against resident Muslim populations and Muslim and racialised migrants. This aids in the continuous economic exploitation of these populations, many of whom live in economic insecurity, and also provides an easy scapegoat for the failings of nation-states and the EU to create equitable living conditions for all members of the population.



Photos from the transnational UK-Germany Anti-Islamophobia delegation. Credit: Seema Syeda

The political, social and economic context above have established a broader structure of White Supremacy in Europe and the world. Scholar Francis Lee Ansley defines it as follows:

By “white supremacy” I do not mean to allude only to the self-conscious racism of white supremacist hate groups. I refer instead to a political, economic, and cultural system in which whites overwhelmingly control power and material resources, conscious and unconscious ideas of white superiority and entitlement are widespread, and relations of white dominance and non-white subordination are daily re-enacted across a broad array of institutions and social settings (Ansley, 1997).

The campaign

Another Europe Is Possible (AEIP) was founded to campaign against Brexit from a progressive and left-wing perspective. This meant supporting the transnational nature of the EU whilst being critical of its crony capitalist, neoliberal and imperial tendencies, including violent border regimes. It also meant tackling the structural causes of Brexit, particularly anti-immigrant sentiment and scapegoating of migrants for the inequality and economic failures caused by the state.

Noting the rampant Islamophobia amongst the supporters and the rhetoric of the ‘Leave’ campaign and the far right in the UK and Europe, AEIP decided to launch a transnational anti-Islamophobia campaign, focusing on the UK, France and Germany as key sites of state-led and far right Islamophobia.

Process and actions

AEIP is a member-led democratic organisation. Its strategy is decided by the National Committee, elected by members. A proposal to launch an anti-Islamophobia campaign was put forwards at National Committee and agreed.

An anti-Islamophobia working group was established. It was led by members of the National Committee with lived experience of Islamophobia - Seema Syeda and Shaista Aziz, who both have Muslim backgrounds.

An important foundation of any successful anti-racism campaign is that it should be led by those with lived experience; firstly to counter the dominance of white supremacy rather than reinforce it, but also because those with lived experience are by nature best placed to understand the nuances of the issues at play. It was also important as recognition of the fact that Islamophobia could be present and reinforced within our own organisation and progressive spaces alike, as it is a societal problem which few people have had awareness training and exposure about. Those without lived experience were also involved in the working group as key allies and supporters.

One of the first steps requested by the National Committee was an anti-Islamophobia training session for the committee itself. AEIP lacked financial resources for a formal training at the time, but we did run a public anti-Islamophobia event platforming UK Muslim voices who described the different kinds of Islamophobia they had experienced in progressive, centrist, right-wing and far right spaces alike, as well as the connection between Brexit and Islamophobia.

“An important foundation of any successful anti-racism campaign is that it should be led by those with lived experience.”

We then held a transnational event in the run up to the French presidential election 2022 where Marine Le Pen ran her candidacy on a deeply Islamophobic campaign while the incumbent President Macron replicated some of her language and implemented Islamophobic policies, continuing a long tradition of French state attacks on the basic rights of Muslims in the metropole and in the colonies, supported by actors across the political spectrum. At this event we platformed self organised Muslim and migrant-led groups such as the Front Uni Des Immigration et Quartiers Populaire as well as important allies such as Centre d’études et d’initiatives de solidarité internationale (CEDETIM) and Réseau Initiatives pour un autre monde (IPAM).

Funding

To move the campaign beyond online events, funding was needed. Allies and supporters on the national committee with strong links to funders supported the campaign by finding a funder, the Friedrich Ebert Stiftung, to enable us to conduct research into Islamophobia across Europe.

Research

The research project was led by a staffer (myself) from a Muslim background with lived experience of Islamophobia. Two research reports were produced, one analysing Islamophobia in France and another analysing Islamophobia and the rise of the far-right in Germany. The reports were launched at a fringe event of Labour Party Conference 2022 as well as online.

The success of this collaboration led to further funding to build practically on the report’s recommendations.

Transnational organising

Funding was secured from the FES and AEIP for a delegation of all-women Muslim elected representatives and civil society activists to visit Cologne, Germany and meet with various civil society and faith representatives, researchers, NGOs and elected officials, Muslim and non-Muslim alike, to share knowledge, experience and campaigning goals across borders. Organisational, administrative and network contacts in Germany were provided by FES London. A particular focus was tackling Islamophobia within political parties such as the Labour Party and the SPD, as well as progressive spaces in general. The delegation took place in May 2023 and resulted in the publication of a with recommendations. The report was launched to a U.K. audience in November 2023 coinciding with UK anti-Islamophobia Awareness Month, and will be launched to a German audience in 2024.

“Anti-racist campaigning requires clear anti-colonial analysis and action.”

KEY OUTCOMES:

Outcome 1: Creating a space for awareness raising about Islamophobia within left and progressive organisations.

The opening of such a space, led by women activists from Muslim backgrounds, was an achievement in itself. Islamophobia specifically is rarely given attention or discussed within progressive spaces. The 2022 fringe event at Labour Party conference, for instance, was the only one of its kind to explore the issue.

One of the findings of the 2023 delegation was that racism and Islamophobia were inadequately tackled within progressive organisations and spaces, partly due to a belief amongst the leadership and membership of those organisations that they didn’t have internal anti-racism or Islamophobia issues because they ‘instinctively’ had the right politics. The lack of representation beyond token diversity in these spaces indicates that they too replicate the structural problems of racism and discrimination.

With political parties like the Labour Party and the SPD specifically, this is further evident in policies that reinforce violence towards migrants, racialised people and Muslims at home and abroad.

The UK space does have some examples of Muslim groups starting to self-organise, as well as ‘Black Asian and Minority Ethnic’ spaces within the Labour Party. While this is a slightly better landscape than the German context where fewer such spaces/initiatives exist, the delegation was able to discuss some of the opportunities and inadequacies of the ‘BAME’ approach, as outlined in the report.

The opening up of spaces to discuss these issues was a key change in itself, with German representatives expressing surprise that it was even possible to

organise such a delegation. It was the first time many activists had the opportunity to attend a transnational anti-Islamophobia discussion. Groups such as Another Europe Is Possible itself, the Friedrich Ebert Stiftung and the SPD have begun to change internally by simply creating such spaces, though there is much more work to be done.

Outcome 2: empowerment of Muslim 'leaders'

AEIP staffers leading the project augmented their transnational organising and project management skills in a European, party political and civil society context. Delegates on the project also went on to greater leadership positions, one young delegate is now standing in local elections in order to increase Muslim women's representation and another has since founded the 'Anti-Islamophobia Working Group' which lobbies institutions and civil society to tackle Islamophobia. Other leading researchers have expanded the reach of their research to activist and civil society groups outside their home countries.

Outcome 3: Networks and partnerships

A key transnational network of anti-Islamophobia campaigners acting across left and progressive political spaces has been created. This network shares information and knowledge, providing a base to continue its joint campaigning initiatives in the years ahead. The struggle to tackle Islamophobia is a long-term one that requires many years of commitment. Further funding has been secured to continue the campaign in 2024.



Seema Syeda is Head of Communications at European Alternatives. She has a varied background in publishing, law and organizing with a key focus on dismantling racial capitalism. Seema has recently started a substack @seemasyeda. She writes this article in her capacity as a campaigner at Another Europe Is Possible.

KEY LESSON LEARNED

- Centre people with lived experience as leaders and organisers
- Advocate community self-organising
- Engage allies and supporters in broader campaigning, networking and knowledge-sharing spaces
- Use partnerships and collaborative working to join up local and national grassroots actors across borders, focusing on specific themes relevant to all, e.g. Islamophobia
- Physical meetings are an important complement to online events, in order to build trust
- With anti-racist work, it is important to acknowledge white supremacist and colonial structures can and do exist within progressive spaces. This awareness itself is an important starting point for any constructive and meaningful work to begin dismantling these structures.

On anti-Islamophobia specifically, it must be acknowledged that there is no clear 'win'. Indeed, Islamophobia continues to be on the rise across the UK, Germany and France, with a tendency amongs political parties such as Labour and the SPD to take ever worsening stances on the issue in response to (and reinforcing) the rising popularity of the far right. Reformist approaches grafted onto an underlying structure of coloniality can only go so far - anti-racist campaigning requires clear anti-colonial analysis and action.

People's Assemblies: a radical proposition

Just Stop Oil activist Bertie Coyle argues why we need deliberative democracy now.

Politics is broken but democracy is the cure. That's the call coming from the corner of the 'environmental movement' that I stand in - an organisation called Just Stop Oil. Based in the UK, we're part of the A22 network, a global coalition of like-minded groups which take disruptive direct action against drivers of the climate crisis.

Just Stop Oil is called a radical group by Britain's media. But we must take this with a pinch of salt because these media institutions are the other face of the coin to parliamentary politics, which we agreed was broken in the first sentence. I don't think we're that radical. That we're in civil resistance may be, and this is essential to overturn the corrupt systems. But the

demand for 'No New Oil and Gas Licences in the UK' is quite a reasonable goal. Moderate, even.

A radical ask might be demilitarisation. Or the abolition of police and prisons. Or the end of rentierism, finally allowing landlords to retrain as ballet dancers, and train drivers, and watchmakers. These sorts of programmes could shift the systems of inequality and violence which prop up the power of a few at the expense of the masses. They sound radical to me both in the sense of 'radical, dude!', but also 'radical change'. Comparatively, starting the slow process of winding up noxious carbon fuels for cheap and cheerful renewables doesn't seem like a big ask.

Finally stopping oil might not end business as usual. Resources will flow from the south to north, valuable things will be made by workers and owned by bosses, and GDP growth will be the metric by which we measure the value of life. Some companies may go bankrupt. But that's not a radical change. There was probably a time when the Zeppelin market was considered too big to fail and local anarchists scrawled "IT IS EASIER TO IMAGINE AN END TO THE WORLD THAN AN END TO BLIMPS" in pedestrian underpasses. Next thing you know the Hindenburg disaster happens and everyone gets used to aeroplanes instead. Capitalism grinds on.

The energy transition could be radical if it made the means of creating electricity a common good. But if it replicates the same exploitative structures that we see now, just with less emissions, it won't realise its radical potential. In fact, that might save capitalism.

With all that being said, we're having a mighty struggle with this (on the face of it) reformist demand. A majority of British society is against the extraction of oil and gas. It makes you think. The government and the media, that horrible coin we picked up earlier, are both riding out for a sunset industry that is causing the worst crisis the world has seen since the Cretaceous-Paleogene extinction event. You would be forgiven for thinking they are not working in our best interest, or even the interest of their own class. It's a mystery.

"We're not intrinsically buyers of a political product, but community members."

Mysteries like this, strange conflicts that fail to collapse under the weight of their contradictions, must be the result of system failure. A system that functions for a time can stop functioning due to external change. Even if it was better than the last one, it has now failed. Representative politics is better than feudalism. But feudalism was better than slavery. The hobbled form of democracy we currently have is not up to the task of softening the blow of global climate collapse, let alone



A Just Stop Oil direct action at a petrol station. Credit: Just Stop Oil.

stopping it. This is unarguable. We've passed 1.5C warming, and 2C is locked in.

People didn't vote for this. They didn't vote for the UK's rivers to be looped into the sewerage system, and they didn't vote for a genocide in Gaza either. But here we are: swimming is an extreme sport and our government funds the companies that make white phosphorus munitions for Israel. British politics, so-called representative democracy, is producing self-replicating errors, glitching into a broken loop of toxic interests. The causes for this failure are malignant, but the cure isn't.

Citizens' assemblies (sometimes 'people's' or 'jury') are a model of direct democracy that orients power from the bottom-up. Creating policy through this kind of open, deliberative process is more empowering than liberal democracy. Rarely are people asked to speak their minds, even less be listened to. But it's a liberating experience, and creates enormous goodwill. That's because we're not intrinsically buyers of a political product, but community members.

Fully realised, the citizen's assembly model is a paradigm shift to a new, deeper form of democracy and popular empowerment. A salve to the political process. In this very moment it's the tool to plan, organise, and execute progressive campaigns that win elections. In



A Citizen's Assembly takes place on the hilltop of Athens as part of the Democratic Odyssey project, of which European Alternatives is a convening partner.

"Taking hammers to a petrol station feels more radical than a sober, directly democratic process to decide on key national issues - but it's not necessarily."

the years to come it will be embedded into the process of government - selected by sortition, like a poll, so that big money can't corrupt it.

An acerbic saying goes: liberals hear tone not content. Transgressive actions that call for reform are radical in tone, but not content. Having tea with your neighbours in the function room of a mosque and thrashing out local matters isn't radical in tone, but it is in nature. Taking hammers to a petrol station feels more radical than a sober, directly democratic process to decide on key national issues - but it's not necessarily. Perhaps we'll be fair to the liberals who confuse tone for content by admitting that leftists can confuse 'radical, dude!' for 'radical change'.

Liberal democracy has been captured by private interests, and the consequences of this can be measured in gargantuan units of suffering. Some reading

"Fully realised, the citizen's assembly model is a paradigm shift to a new, deeper form of democracy and popular empowerment."

this are certain that the climate crisis will cause global collapse in the coming year. Others would ridicule that prospect. Wherever you fall on this spectrum, you may agree that the path to a safer, more progressive future is self-government by the people. This is a radical proposition, more so than tinkering with the details of energy provision. Flip a coin - real democracy or fascism.

Bertie Coyle is a writer who takes action against climate collapse and border violence with Just Stop Oil. Just Stop Oil has formed Umbrella, a new hub to coordinate the creation of radical, nonviolent projects. Take part in this revolution at juststopoil.org.

How to be a free European digital citizen

IT engineer Rafa Font explores practical alternatives to big tech.

Technology was supposed to be different. It should empower us to do more, with fewer intermediaries. But instead, we are trapped by “infinite scrolling”, and our productivity derails. Everyone should have access. It should be both safe enough for kids, and easy enough for older people. But reality is different.

This is not the technology that we signed up for

We should be able to choose providers. A photo provider from a company, and a storage provider from another, should work together. But when someone sends

you pictures on OneDrive, but you use Google Photos, you need to download them one by one and upload them again.

We should be able to express ourselves (without being jerks). Why, then, did our friend have to take down that Instagram video of her holidays, as she was getting so many rude comments?

The online environment should be safe. However, we recently received a suspicious email asking us for our credit card details, which we promptly marked as “phishing”.



IT should be sustainable. Energy consumption should be low, and hardware components should be recycled. Compare that ideal with the reality: data centres built beside rivers, returning the water used for cooling 2-3°C warmer.

These six aspects (productivity, access, choice, freedom, safety, sustainability) are extracted from the “European Declaration on Digital Rights and Principles”, from December 2022. It seems we’re still far from the ideal.

Big Tech is Big, but is it Tech?

Their business model is based on capturing our attention, measuring what we do, and then showing us personalised ads.

We might think that the main revenue of the Big

Tech industry comes from technology. It doesn’t. It comes from advertisements, so we could call them the Big Ads industry instead. In 2022, 80% of Google’s revenue came via ads. For Twitter, it was 90%. For Meta (including Facebook and Instagram), over 98%.

This is their play book:

1. In order to sell more ads, they tailor them to the audience.
2. To tailor them to the audience, they need more user data, including their online behaviour.
3. To gather more data, they have to increase the time we’re online (this is the well-known metric called “engagement”).
4. To increase engagement, they develop techniques such as “infinite scrolling”.

“Do you feel bad after two hours scrolling social media? This is exactly what it was designed for.”

Do you feel bad after two hours scrolling social media? This is exactly what it was designed for.

The European Union has a history of disagreements with Big Tech, and there’s a long list of fines issued due to competition misbehaviours. Despite all this, European governments still advertise big American tech companies in their front pages, for free. Because free publicity is what you do when you show the icons of Twitter/X, Instagram, and Facebook in your front page.

The European Union has brand-new laws for the online world: the “Digital Markets Act” (DMA), and the “Digital Services Act” (DSA). As digital citizens, do we need all this regulation?

You might be using the **Chrome** browser on an **Android** phone. On your **Windows** laptop, maybe you use **WhatsApp** web app for your social life, **LinkedIn** for your professional contacts, and **Gmail**. You just received a message: it’s a friend sending you a **YouTube** video. Your phone blips: it’s an **Instagram** notification. You spend more time there now than on **Facebook**.

In just five minutes, you have used 9 tools that are directly affected by the new regulation.

European institutions are setting limits to Big Tech

European laws might affect the whole world. This happened with the RoHS (to remove hazardous substances from electronics), and with GDPR (to protect personal data). International companies that operate in Europe have to comply, and sometimes it’s cheaper

to adapt their whole business to what Europe requires. That’s the well-known “Brussels effect”. Its latest hit has been Apple’s switch to USB-C (also known as “standard European port”) in the iPhone15.

The DMA sets obligations for “gatekeepers”: not to abuse their position of power to promote their own products, not to use personal data gathered through one product into another (e.g. feed Facebook with WhatsApp data), and allow you to install software from other sources (being able to get your apps from other “stores”, not only the Play Store or the App Store).

The DSA, in turn, targets “online platforms”. On them, ads must be prominently marked as such, and users can know who is paying for them. Those with more than 45 million users in the EU get special treatment. These are the “Very Large Online Platforms and Search Engines” (e.g., Wikipedia, Booking, Pinterest). They are mandated to run risk assessments of potential infringements, mitigate them (for instance by reinforcing their content moderation), and set up crisis response mechanisms. Their algorithms will be audited (such as the one that composes your Instagram feed, or the recommendations you get from YouTube).

“The European Union has a history of disagreements with Big Tech, and there’s a long list of fines issued due to competition misbehaviours.”

Four European Alternatives for digital products that you can use today: Proton, Mastodon, Murena and Fairphone

Under the European vision of being online, you’re above all a citizen. Technology is here to serve you. Under the current state of affairs, however, you’re above all a customer, if not a product. You can use technology, but this is a sub-product of the ad-selling business.

It’s time to meet the resistance.

On the website “**European Alternatives for Digital Products**”, Constantin Graf, a freelance software developer from Vienna, is compiling a list of IT tools created and hosted in Europe. He’s doing it to support local businesses and improve data protection, as EU-produced digital tools tend to be better at complying with related EU laws than US-made tools. Hosting in the EU is an important requirement for companies handling sensitive data.

These tools support the freedom of the European digital citizen. Let’s highlight four examples that you can use right now.

Reclaim your digital identity with ProtonMail

Today, email is your digital identity. Gmail scans your emails to insert related advertisements in the middle of your inbox. That’s their business.

Proton is not in the ads business; it’s in the tech business. It was created in 2014 in Switzerland to reclaim people’s control over their privacy, starting with email. Some of its strong selling points have been security, privacy, encryption and open source. 10 years later they’re a profitable company with offices all over Europe.

Andy Yen, Proton’s CEO, is an advocate of local technology: “*European tech has the money, the talent, and the ambition, but it lacks the appropriate rules*”.

One appropriate rule would be, for instance, being able to avoid the official application stores, because they take a 30% cut of each sale. The right to choose a different application store is part of the new EU regulation.

Mastodon: a free, open-source, decentralised social media platform

Twitter/X is working hard to destroy its own status as the Internet’s public arena, one scandal at a time.

Mastodon is one alternative. Created in 2016, it received several waves of users in the Twitter Migration, especially in late 2022, after Twitter’s acquisition by

Elon Musk. However, it still has only 10 million users.

Mastodon is run by a German non-profit. It doesn’t have advertising, so you can be sure that you’re not the product. Its source of revenue is crowdfunding.

Mastodon doesn’t have two features that have been blamed for toxicity: infinite scrolling, and quoting posts.

De-Googling your phone with Murena

Do you want to take it further and escape as much as possible from the influence of the gatekeepers? Enter the business of Murena. This company, fully focused on privacy, has created their own version of the Android operating system. It’s called “/e/OS”, it’s open-source and free, and Murena has removed all the components that send data to Google.

This de-googled phone has everything needed to work: Email, Calendar and Drive, provided by Murena Cloud; collaborative office applications, powered by OnlyOffice, and Maps, using (the also European tool) Magic Earth.

Its “Advanced Privacy” tool blocks trackers on your apps, fakes your location, and even hides your IP address, for a maximum of privacy. Researchers have analysed the personal data collected by the usual phone providers, they say: “/e/OS collects essentially no data and in that sense is by far the most private of the Android OS variants studied.”

Fairphone

To round this up, you can get the /e/OS de-Googled system on top of a European phone, from the ethical brand Fairphone.

What makes a phone more “ethical” than others? European repair communities (like The Restart Project or Repair Café) provide this answer: “the most ethical phone is the one you already have”. That’s because extending its life reduces e-waste and prevents mining of new resources.



Mining for minerals used in mobile phones in the Congo.
Credit: Creative Commons.

Fairphone, based in Amsterdam, agrees, and claims to offer the second most ethical choice. In their 11 years of experience, they have worked on ethical sourcing of minerals, providing living wages to the workers involved in manufacturing, and extending the life-span of their products.

Minerals needed to build phones often come from countries in conflict, where child labour is common. Fairphone sources their materials in coordination with the Alliance for Responsible Mining. Note that phone manufacturers don't buy minerals directly. Instead, they commission electronic parts from intermediaries. Fairphone is going out of the traditional way to source 'ethical minerals. But not everything that glitters is gold: Fairphone 4 had 40% of 'fair' materials. There's still a long way to go.

Workers' conditions are also important. Part of Fairphone earnings go into complementing worker's salaries to reach a "living wage". They do this with mine labourers and electronics assembly staff.

Finally, e-waste. On one front, Fairphone collects old phones for recycling. On the other hand, they increase the lifespan of their products. Fairphones are the most repairable devices in the market, having received a 10/10 score from the repair company iFixit. They roll out software updates even for their older phones, reaching up to 7 years of support.

“Minerals needed to build phones often come from countries in conflict, where child labour is common.”

The difficult route to technological freedom

There are other areas in which European competition with the forces of surveillance capitalism is more difficult.

– The Search. Google occupies 85% of the market. A European search engine, called Ecosia, offers a non-profit and green alternative. Every 50 searches, they plant a tree. However, the search results are not fully theirs: they use in the background Microsoft's engine, Bing, and apply on top their own algorithms. Still, it's a good option to make Ecosia your default search engine. If you want to know another possible future player in this area, check out "Stract", the open-source search engine developed by Danish PhD student Mikkel Denker.

– The Browser. Another Google kingdom, with over 60% of the market share. A European competitor is the Norwegian company "Vivaldi". Their main selling point is "we don't track you", and it blocks trackers and ads. They make money via sponsored bookmarks, and from search engines (if you select Ecosia as your default search engine in Vivaldi, the search engine pays an amount).

– The Cloud. A typical question from the European administration when moving IT systems to the cloud is: is there a European provider? We'll single out two options: the French OVH, and the German Hetzner. They can offer a virtual private server, but they're

not well-equipped to compete with the large array of cloud services that Amazon, Azure, or Google have.

Let's start!

We have presented here four European alternatives useful to regain some digital freedom. They are not theoretical options, but practical choices, on the market today, waiting for users like you.

We can find ourselves with a Fairphone in our hands, with the /e/OS system installed and no Google surveillance, using Mastodon as the social network of our choice, and using Proton for our Email (and Calendar, Drive, and Password Manager).

With alternative technology, we can be more free digital citizens, and start looking at the tech scene with a different perspective.

Rafa Font writes the newsletter *The European Perspective*, telling stories of the sociocultural, non-institutional Europe. He is an IT Engineer working for European institutions, a Green activist, and a Work From Anywhere advocate. You can find him on Mastodon: @rafa_font@mastodon.online.

Beyond The Nation-State

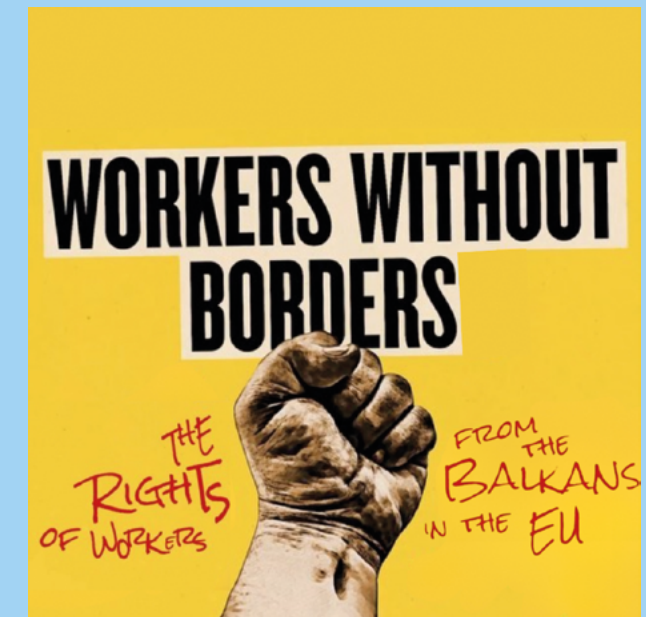
We've launched a new series of podcasts and videos at European Alternatives. Scan the QR codes below to dive into Beyond the Nation-State or Workers Without Borders, or watch our latest Power to the People event on farming and agriculture.



Beyond the Nation-State

How can we act beyond borders? What alternative realities can we build? How do we take care of people & planet, building a solidary society that works for everyone - at the intersection of class, gender, sexual orientation & geographic origin? How do we take care of non-human beings? In the Beyond the Nation-State podcast series, we meet transnational activists, academics, cultural practitioners & civil society to imagine, demand & enact alternatives.

Scan the QR code to listen to
Beyond the Nation-State:



Workers Without Borders

Workers Without Borders is a three-part podcast series bringing together migrant workers from the Western Balkans that are currently working or have worked in different European countries in different sectors. We explore the challenges they face, their experiences, and their motivations to move between countries.

Scan the QR code to listen
to Workers Without Borders:



Power to the People

Watch the latest Power to the People seminar on who makes key decisions in Europe about farming, agriculture and food supply. In many European countries farmers are taking to the streets to demand a change in the rules governing the food system, from farm to shops, all the way to the fork – touching all our lives in the process. The highly competitive and industrialized food system is seen by many as a burden for farmers, consumers, the environment and climate. While there is less consensus among protesters about what exactly needs to change, the feeling of political powerlessness in the decision-making process in the European Union and in the member states is palpable for many – as are severe conflicts of interests. With the EU quickly backtracking on key nature and agricultural reforms as response to the farmer protests, many ask:

Who decides in Europe?

This is why we as Power to the People Group hosted a transnational, multilingual and interactive webinar covering this topic. It is the start of a series on participatory democracy in Europe. With expert speakers we took a close look at how European democracy really works – both the written as well as unwritten rules between parliament, governments, civil society and lobbying. What to keep and what needs to be changed to make sure that the priorities and values of the European citizens are not forgotten? We will hear from those involved at different stages of the decision-making process

Knowledge is power. Power to change.

We aimed not to answer all the questions on agriculture, food pricing, nature and climate. What we want to do is collect and distribute knowledge about the decision making processes as they are, and as they could be. European democracy is a vast sea and in this event we want to give you all a map to better navigate it – not least with the European elections coming up. With knowledge comes the power to change.

Speakers include:

- Prof Vivien A. Schmidt, Jean Monnet Professor of European Integration and International Relations in the Frederick S. Pardee School of Global Studies; Professor of Political Science at Boston University and Founding Director of BU's Center for the Study of Europe.
- Isabel Paliotta, Policy Officer for Sustainable Food Systems at the European Environmental Bureau (EEB)
- MEP Jutta Paulus, Negotiator for the Nature Restoration Law and Methane Regulation (Greens, Germany)
- Marta Messa, Secretary General for Slow Food International
- Bernd Schmitz, farmer and managing director of the “Working Group for Peasant Agriculture e.V. (AbL)” in Germany
- Kalypso Nicolaidis, Professor at the School of Transnational Governance at the European University Institute and one of the leaders of the “Democratic Odyssey”, a campaign for a permanent European Peoples’ Assembly
- Ingeborg Niestroy, RIFS – Research Institute for Sustainability (Potsdam), project coordinator of the Real Deal project on citizen participation for the European Green Deal. www.realdeal.eu
- Further guests are invited. The online list will be updated regularly.

Versions in English, German, Italian and French are available .

This is the first event of our new series “Building a ‘Digital European Public Sphere’ Participatory democracy in the EU: current challenges and future perspectives” as part of the Democratic Odyssey for a permanent European peoples’ assembly (more [here](#)). All our previous events are available [here](#).



Power to the People is a cooperation of European Alternatives, European University Institute, Europe Calling, Mehr Demokratie, Another Europe is Possible, Citizens Takeover Europe, ECI Campaign and The Democratic Odyssey.

Borders

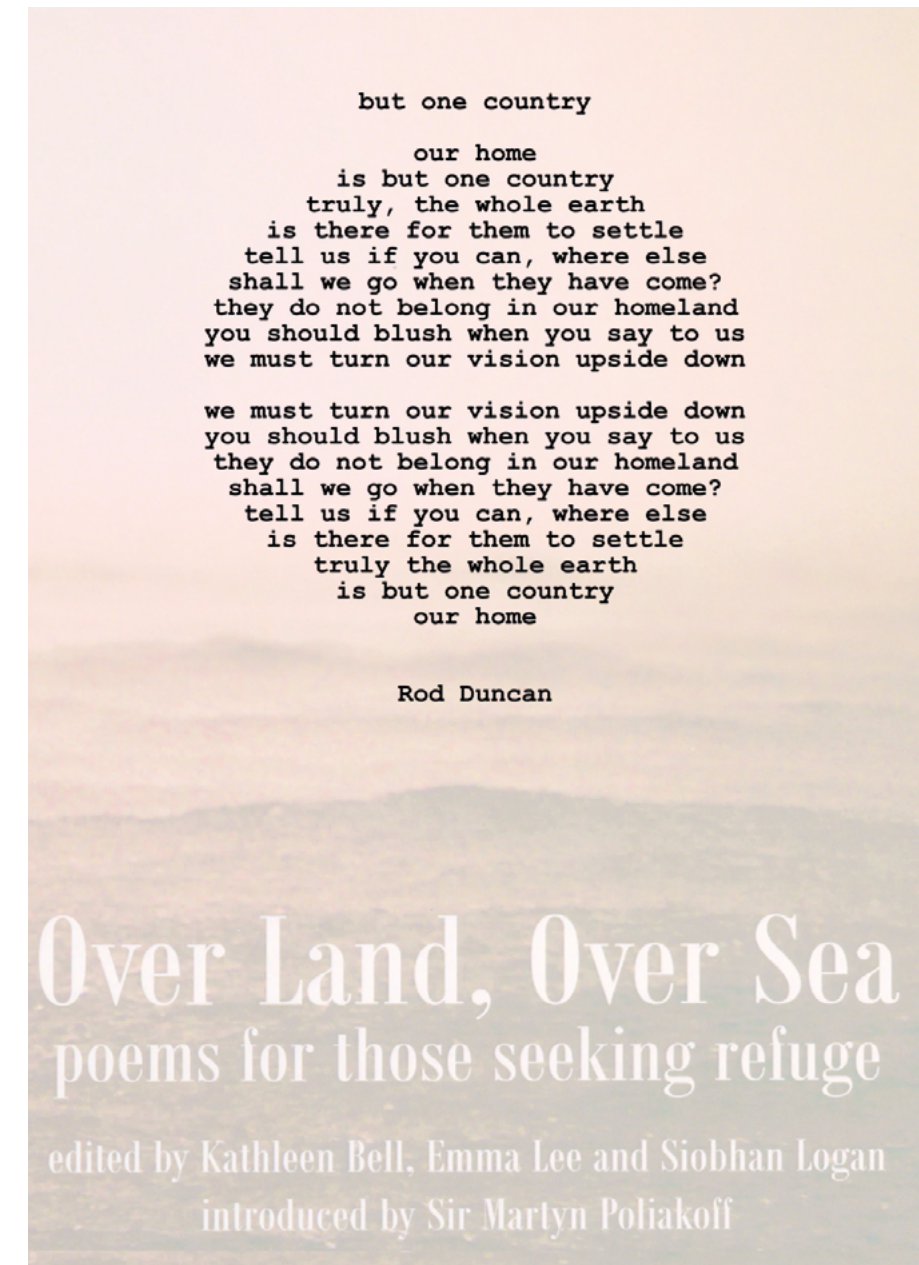
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**Art
Beyond
Borders**

Diaspora Art: creativity takes courage

Dina Ntziora on achieving authentic
representation in cultural creation.



But one Country, Rod Duncan - Over Land, Over
Sea: poems for those seeking refuge, edited by
Kathleen Bell, Emma Lee and Siobhan Logan.

In a world marked by diverse cultures, the arts serve as a powerful catalyst for fostering community cohesion within diaspora populations. This transcendent force not only preserves the intricate threads that connect individuals to their homelands but also propels a wave of contemporary creativity that embraces traditional folk art, promoting cultural diversity through various modes of artistic expression.

“For refugees and those seeking refuge, whose journeys are often marked by hardship and displacement, the arts become a lifeline.”

The primary objective of supporting the contemporary cultural manifestations of diaspora communities goes beyond mere preservation—it is a celebration of identity, a testament to the richness of shared heritage. By nurturing these artistic endeavors, we create a platform that values the contributions of every individual, irrespective of their background or circumstances. This inclusive approach enables artists from diverse backgrounds to showcase their talents and share their unique experiences with an audience that is receptive and supportive.

For refugees and those seeking refuge, whose journeys are often marked by hardship and displacement, the arts become a lifeline. They offer a means of expression, a way to communicate across barriers and rebuild a sense of belonging. The creative process becomes a sanctuary for healing, a space where resilience is transformed into art that speaks to shared humanity.

Communities, in turn, come together through these artistic expressions. Whether through exhibitions, performances, or collaborative projects, the arts provide a common ground where differences are celebrated rather than feared. In this shared space, diverse narratives intertwine, creating a tapestry of unity that transcends borders and enriches the collective human experience.

As we explore the transformative power of diaspora arts for community cohesion, it becomes evident that the creative process is not only about individual expression but also about forging connections. It is a bridge that spans cultural gaps, fostering understanding, empathy, and a sense of shared identity. In the face of challenges, the arts become a testament to resilience, a force that unites, heals, and ultimately strengthens the bonds that tie us together.

In what ways can the arts be leveraged to empower refugees not only as storytellers but also as active participants in shaping the narratives that define their experiences, and what role do creatives play in facilitating this shift towards a more inclusive and participatory approach to cultural expression?

Considering the intricate relationship between the arts, community, and collective identity, how can creatives and cultural professionals navigate the fine line between cultural appreciation and appropriation, ensuring that the power of artistic expression is wielded responsibly and respectfully?

Embracing the transformative power of cultural exchange through the Arts of Diaspora extends beyond specific events, becoming an ongoing narrative interwoven into the social fabric of our communities. The belief in the ability of arts and culture to shape attitudes, foster understanding, and celebrate diversity is not bound by temporal constraints but rather represents a continuous and enriching presence in our collective experience.

Activities centered around the Arts of Diaspora, rooted in shared principles and values, serve as dynamic agents for cultivating informed and inclusive attitudes.

“How can creatives and cultural professionals navigate the fine line between cultural appreciation and appropriation?”

These engagements offer experiences that nurture empathy and connection, shedding light on the diverse



Palestine solidarity graffiti in Bristol, UK, by graffiti artists 3DOM, @rowdyunofficial @feekertron @dicy700 and @feralthings.



Young people with lived experiences of migration visiting the exhibition Seeing the Invisible by Outset Greece at the National Gardens, Athens. © Athina Lekka



Murals by The Goodness Tour & Refugee Week Greece © UNHCR/Socrates Baltagiannis.

reasons behind displacement, the rights of diaspora communities, and the structural challenges they encounter.

As creatives and cultural professionals, our role is to hold space for the voices and stories of diaspora communities. By providing a platform for their artistic expression, we transcend stereotypes and resonate with mainstream audiences, contributing to a broader understanding of diverse perspectives.

“Ensuring authentic representation and avoiding tokenism in creative endeavors involves fostering meaningful and respectful engagement with diverse communities.”

Through cultural activities, a sense of unity is fostered, offering the broader community an opportunity to deepen their understanding of diverse perspectives. By showcasing the abundance of diaspora narratives through diverse artistic mediums, Diaspora Arts reaches out to mainstream institutions, schools, local councils, faith groups, and cultural organizations, providing a platform for the wider community to explore and appreciate the richness of diversity.

Ensuring authentic representation and avoiding tokenism in creative endeavors involves fostering meaningful and respectful engagement with diverse communities. This entails authentic collaboration from

the project’s inception, involving community members in decision-making processes, and sharing power over the narrative. Diverse representation should go beyond surface-level characteristics, considering a range of experiences, perspectives, and stories. Long-term relationships built on trust and understanding contribute to more authentic representation, while continual self-reflection and education help creators navigate potential biases. The emphasis is on empowering communities to tell their own stories and cultivating a deep appreciation for the complexities within diverse narratives. By adopting these principles, creatives and cultural professionals can contribute to a richer, more inclusive creative landscape that transcends tokenism and authentically celebrates diversity.

Providing a stage for voices to be heard, stories to be told, and healing to unfold through art and culture is a profound acknowledgment of the power inherent in shared human experiences. This becomes particularly crucial when engaging with minorities, underserved communities, and those experiencing displacement. Beneath the surface of apparent differences, we discover a tapestry of shared emotions, dreams, and aspirations that connect us on a fundamental level.

Embracing the role of creatives and cultural professionals in advocating for authentic representation and breaking through systemic barriers requires courage and a readiness to take risks. The act of fostering unity and understanding through cultural activities serves as a daring endeavor to challenge pre-existing norms and biases within mainstream institutions. By showcasing the abundance of diaspora narratives through various artistic mediums, these individuals are not only providing a platform for the wider community to explore diversity but are also confronting systemic barriers that may resist the amplification of marginalized voices.



Friendship, community and solidarity at the Ioannina Community Refugee Week Celebration. © Marina Tomara



Children painting during Refugee Week at the Ioannina Community Celebration. © Marina Tomara

“In what ways can the arts be leveraged to empower refugees not only as storytellers but also as active participants in shaping the narratives that define their experiences?”

In conclusion, the engagement with minorities, underserved communities, and displaced populations underscores a fundamental truth: beneath external differences, we share a profound commonality as human beings. The narratives woven through art and culture illuminate our shared struggles, triumphs, and aspirations, firmly asserting that our similarities far surpass the perceived divisions. This acknowledgment serves as a bridge connecting diverse communities, nurturing a sense of unity and collaboration that transcends societal barriers. Through the transformative power of storytelling, art becomes a conduit for understanding, compassion, and collective growth, reinforcing the essential interconnectedness that binds us all.

Dina Ntziora is an Engagement Manager and Researcher. She specialises in fostering inclusive and collaborative practices. A participant on the European Alternatives' Democracy, Elections, Mentoring, and Organising programme, she is a dedicated activist and producer, with a keen focus on promoting inclusion, well-being, and ethical principles.

A boat brings back joy

Celia Zayas recounts her experiences of Festival Sãlôngô in the island of the sleepy volcano.





Participants connect and rejoice during Festival Sálóngô.



“Annobón! Land!”, cried someone.

Kids stood quickly and went to the deck to see the emerging land. I stood there, lying on the improvised common bed we had built on the floor.

“It’s just four. We will not be arriving until six or seven,” someone said, turning his back to continue sleeping.

We had been on the boat for four days. An old cargo ship with no cabins and capacity for 50 comfortably-seated passengers in a room, had been home for over 400 people and tons of fuel for the town’s generator, bags of rice, boxes of oil, building materials, water and other basics sent by relatives, that had no other way to arrive in Annobón.

After sleeping one on top of the other, over the luggage, next to the engines, and on every little corner safe from the wind and the cold for three nights, sharing a single toilet room, everyone was thrilled to arrive. Furthermore, many were returning to their homeland after years of being away. This boat being the only means of transportation to and from Annobón, once a month, and announced only two days in advance, makes it difficult for people to keep ties with their island.

For some of us, the trip meant a discovery; we were about to hold the very first festival in the history of the island.

Annobón: *the where.*

Annobón is a sleepy volcano of 22 km² in the middle of the Atlantic Ocean, in the Gulf of Guinea. It belongs to Equatorial Guinea, yet its closest neighbor is São Tomé e Príncipe, with whom relations are almost non-existent. Geographically, and symbolically, Annobón is a far place relative to neighbouring lands.

Annobón is home to the *Ambo* or Annobonese people, one of the six ethnic groups of Equatorial Guinea, but most of them do not live in Annobón. Lack of resources, transportation, food, employment, communications – 3G-net arrived only in December 2022 – frequent electricity shortages and limited access to education (only primary school can be completed on the island), force people to migrate to other parts of the country, where they usually establish themselves permanently.

Still, they keep longing and dreaming of this central African paradise island, full of fishes, whales, dolphins, tuna, forests, rivers and lakes, where kids learn to swim and fish before they are even able to walk. Perhaps this has made Annobón a land of poets, writers and musicians, despite the difficult living conditions.

Outside, they keep the dream alive through the *Ambo* culture: a language, *fá d’Ambo*, unique music and dance styles, spirituality, traditions, and a common and complex history emerging from colonization(s), oppression(s), creativity and community. Yet, for many, *Ambo* culture is a dying culture.

In a globalized world with clear cultural hegemonies, surviving as a (very) minoritarian culture requires political will and resources, both of which are lacking in this case. The absolute lack of protection, systematization or recognition measures, and a general perception of the *Ambo* culture not being *useful* for scaling up in the social ladder, as it is not an asset for



Participants connect and rejoice during Festival Sálóngô.



employment, nor is it linked to power spheres, rather the opposite, complete the picture. For many young

“In a globalized world with clear cultural hegemonies, surviving as a (very) minoritarian culture requires political will and resources.”

Ambo people, their culture does not have value, and their island does not have a future. Some others want to change that.

Logistically, politically, and socially, development agencies or big organizations have worked little to none in Annobón. Historically, the island has been left behind and the situation has not changed much, even after Equatorial Guinea became an upper-middle-income country due to oil reserves discovered in the 1990s.

But we were a group of young people with little to lose. Toiñ Bull, a young *Ambo* singer, a prominent figure in the cultural *Ambo* sphere, and a community activist, came up with the idea: what could show the value of traditional culture, while giving opportunity to young people, and disrupting the routine, all at once, in Annobón? A cultural festival.

Festival Sálóngô is a story.

We are back in the boat. It is 9 am, and we see the island in front of us, an enormous green volcano with houses on its slope. People are walking like little ants making their way to the harbour to receive their relatives, who will be arriving with a new rice bag, frozen meat or soap, which they receive with a smile.

“We are here, finally”, says Gines, an *Ambo*-ndowé poet and the accountant of the team. It is his first time visiting Annobón, his mother’s land. For him, the Festival Sálóngô means knowing his own roots.

By 11 am, we were already established in the primary school. The local government had offered us the space for camping and conducting workshops, a local business lent mattresses to us, and the regional hospital lent us their few mosquito nets. Food, water, sound materials and backpacks were all over the place, after being transported from the boat – we had to bring everything from the capital, so as not to make the only supermarket on the island run out of groceries and water – but all 60 people, artists, volunteers, organization, and trainers, were happy.

For five days, the town changed. At the school, we taught. We put in place the program “Xima Ja Pe Tela” (sow in your land), a training program on *Ambo* cultural expressions through music, drums and woodcraft, and on entrepreneurship and cultural management to ensure some continuity of activities. However, with children accounting for the larger demographic group of the island, the children’s space was the most successful. There, youngsters learnt traditional stories, important places, traditions and spirituality of Annobón.

In the afternoons, kids were thrilled by traditional sports competitions, all linked to the beach and the sea, as the most important place in Annobón, and traditional gender stereotypes were challenged, as



Participants connect and rejoice during Festival Sálóngô.



when a woman, dressed up in her best dress, reached second place in the rowing race.

“Everyone went to the town square to dance banx keré-keré, a social and iconic Ambo dance that had not been danced in Annobón for years.”

During the evenings, the magic happened.

A team of volunteers, led by Bob, had built a stage with wood and palm leaves on the beach. Every evening, children, teenagers and older women were gathered around to see the shows and old and iconic musicians and young emerging talents that came to the stage. Once the show ended, everyone went to the town square to dance banx keré-keré, a social and iconic Ambo dance that had not been danced in Annobón for years. Recovering heritage.

Travel with me again. It is Tuesday, August 22. Desmali and D’Ambo da Costa are on stage. The group play drums, and Desmali sings and plays pandê. There are less than ten people in the world that play guitar in this *Ambo* genre, no one does it like him, an old man in his seventies. Desmali is back in his hometown after seven years, due to the festival, and the entire town is there to see him.

“Ayayayayayyyyy, *mi Sonita, tu belleza me dejoo fascinadooo*”, he starts his most famous song, a love song for Sonita.

In a second, people came near the stage and started dancing in pairs. Everybody signs; many people film.

The air feels emotional, and I feel tears on the verge of my eyes. We all know we are witnessing a historical moment. Perhaps, it will be the last time that Desmali sings in his hometown.

He looks to the crowd, with bright eyes and a timid smile. We all cheer him up.

Culture is community.

Festival Sálóngô was, in the end, much more than we had expected. We felt it was a feat. Besides a pathway full of obstacles, from logistics to funding, the most difficult part had been to be welcomed, and to engage people. After decades of young, active people being forced to leave the island seeking their future, those who stayed lost the habit of participating and engaging, which had been replaced by strong skepticism. However, Festival Sálóngô is not just a cultural event. It is an opportunity to bring quality cultural activities to rural areas where public events have disappeared

“The air feels emotional, and I feel tears on the verge of my eyes.”

through time, an occasion to inspire children and teens, and a long-term process for supporting women, elders and young people. It is a space for building communities that can talk about who they are and who they want to be.

From the inside, it is also an experiment. In a context where ethnicities are political, and stereotypes and



The Festival Sálóngô team. Image credits: Celia Zayas

prejudices shape human relations, Festival Sálóngô gathered young people from different ethnicities to visit, work and live together in Annobón, the most unknown place in the country. Those who were from there could show their homeland to those who were not, who felt it as a new place to belong, and to care for. Older artists, with solid careers, met and worked with younger ones, creating new symbiotic bonds that stay until today.

Now, the adventure continues. We embark on our second edition in July 2024. The boat is getting ready to go, and everyone wants to jump in.

We wonder if some of the children who learnt drums last year are now fantastic percussionists of *chia jantá* (*Ambo* music genre), or if they have been practicing for the young talents’ competition.

I have spent the entire evening sending emails, looking for funding. It is difficult. I have a new message. A group of old women want to deliver a workshop on knitting, for other women. It will be an occasion to meet and talk, they say.

I smile; this proves that it all makes sense.

We still have a long road until our second Festival Sálóngô.

But Sálóngô means *passion*.

Celia Zayas is an expert on cultural cooperation and gender equality. She is a co-organizer, curator and communicator of Festival Sálóngô. She is a participant of European Alternatives’ Democracy, Elections, Mentoring & Organizing (DEMO) project).

Note: Festival Sálóngô was possible thanks to the support of the Spanish Cultural Centres in Malabo and Bata, the Government of Equatorial Guinea, and the contributions of artists, individual donors, volunteers and trainers. You can contribute by following us or donating to our crowdfunding.

Theatre of the Oppressed Retrospective

A video interview on transformative performance with theatre director Péter Tasnádi-Sáhy.

Scan the QR code to watch the interview



At last year's Transeuropa Festival, 'Holding Spaces', which took place in Cluj, European Alternatives held a series of participatory theatre workshops entitled 'Disconnected' encouraging audiences to explore and take agency in performatively resolving the conflicts and contradictions of a housing crisis.

The 'Holding Spaces' theme is about our relation to our environment. But we have to ask the question: what is the base of this relation? In prehistorical times Homo sapiens was the part of nature; it was our environment; we depended on it. But today our relationship has changed drastically; we have several kinds of environments, but most of them are alienated, and we hardly have any connection to them. We are disconnected from the places we want to hold.

Forum theatre was developed by the Brazilian theatre director Augusto Boal as part of the Theatre of the Oppressed. Boal aimed to help oppressed people to get a better understanding of their situation and give them a tool to change it. In this video interview theatre director Péter Tasnádi-Sáhy, gives a practical introduction to the method, including snapshots of the workshop itself.

Péter Tasnádi-Sáhy runs forum-theatre workshops for Ukrainian refugees at Dévai Inn (Budapest) and several other places. He holds a Master's diploma in theatre directing from the University of Art Targu Mures and is currently a DLA candidate at BBU.

The theatre of the oppressed workshop at Transeuropa Festival which took place in Cluj last year.
Credit: Tamás Márkos



Série «PATA» Retrospective

**A video interview with Marion Colard
on co-creating art with Cluj's Roma*
communities.**



Scan the QR code to watch the interview

In last year's Transeuropa Festival edition of the EA journal we covered Série «PATA», an exhibition which artist Marion Colard co-created with Roma* communities in Cluj, and presented at the Transeuropa Festival. In this video interview, Marion talks us through the processes and meanings behind the artwork.

Through co-creation workshops, Marion Colard tries to sublimate the stories of people designated as "on the margins of society". She seeks to bring out the beauty and strength of those who are forced to build themselves apart. The systemic discrimination, called "antiziganism" faced by Roma communities* is so tenacious that it seems to prevent any other form of narrative. Even if you have never met one before, if you hear "Roma child living in a slum", an image comes to your mind. Colard's wish is to tell another story and create, with the people concerned, other images.

Behind every word, every stereotype, is a person with their own story, dreams and complex questions that form and grow beyond the living conditions imposed by systemic discrimination. During the workshops, different techniques were proposed such as monotype, painting, writing or photography. They expressed what was important for them in their environment, what they liked and didn't like in their neighbourhood. With photography and colour paint we reinterpreted the art of portrait, embracing self-representation.

**The term "Roma" is used in this article as a generic term and does not cover the diversity of communities on the field.*

Marion Colard is a self-taught visual artist, and has been working with Roma communities for eight years.

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