MOBILISING THE RACIALISED 'OTHERS'

Postethnic Activism, Neoliberalisation and Racial Politics

SUVI KESKINEN

MOBILISING THE RACIALISED 'OTHERS'

This book provides an original approach to the connections of race, racism and neoliberalisation through a focus on 'postethnic activism,' in which mobilisation is based on racialisation as non-white or 'other' instead of ethnic group membership.

Developing the theoretical understanding of political activism under the neoliberal turn in racial capitalism and the increasingly hostile political environment towards migrants and racialised minorities, the book investigates the conditions, forms and visions of postethnic activism in three Nordic countries (Denmark, Sweden and Finland). It connects the historical legacies of European colonialism to the current configurations of racial politics and global capitalism.

The book compellingly argues that contrary to the tendencies of neoliberal postracialism to de-politicise social inequalities the activists are re-politicising questions of race, class and gender in new ways. The book is of interest to scholars and students in sociology, ethnic and racial studies, cultural studies, feminist studies and urban studies.

Suvi Keskinen is Professor of Ethnic Relations at the University of Helsinki, Finland. Her research interests include racism, antiracism, political activism and the politics of belonging. She is the co-editor of *Undoing Homogeneity in the Nordic Region. Migration, Difference and the Politics of Solidarity* (2019) and *Feminisms in the Nordic Region. Neoliberalism, Nationalism and Decolonial Critique* (2021).

"Suvi Keskinen examines emerging forms of antiracist political activism that seek to articulate futures beyond racial, class and gender hierarchies in the Nordic countries. This is particularly urgent and timely against the backdrop of increasing racist, nationalist and right-wing mobilisations in these countries and internationally. Drawing on historical and theoretical work she identifies the specificities of 'racial nordicisation' and its articulations of neoliberal racial capitalism in these countries, long seen as exemplary welfare states with high achievements in gender equality and egalitarianism, yet denying racism. By centering activists' perspectives, the book explores politics of mobilisation as well as belonging that challenge racial, gendered, sexual and classed inequalities. An inspiring and important book!"

Umut Erel, *The Open University, UK*

"Suvi Keskinen makes a step change in documenting contemporary activism in Nordic countries. She reinvigorates the concept, 'postethnic activism', showing that racialising people as 'other' on the basis of appearance or religion treats ethnic differences as irrelevant. In resisting the resulting exclusions, postethnic activists create new spaces of belonging, collaboration and political activism. Keskinen analyses interview and media accounts to illuminate the shared struggle that creates political communities. In analysing the racial logics and racial capitalism in neoliberal states she highlights contemporary global processes that provide the conditions of possibility for postethnic activism. *Mobilising the Racialised 'Others'* is invaluable reading for those seeking to understand the simultaneity of personal and sociostructural processes and the inextricable linking of racialisation and resistance."

Ann Phoenix, *University College London, UK*

"Suvi Keskinen explores feminist and antiracist communities of struggle in Denmark, Finland and Sweden through the voices and the dreams of young activists racialised as 'others'. The book offers an original and analytically provocative way of understanding both feminism and anti-racism in the Nordic region. Written with love, care and a powerful analytical frame the book is essential reading to those interested in social justice agendas globally."

Diana Mulinari, *Lund University, Sweden*

"Suvi Keskinen very adeptly combines theoretical and empirical material in this pioneering study of resistance to racism in three Nordic countries. She identifies and analyzes the ways in which activists inject politics back into racial, class and gender identities to forge coalitions across minority groups and problematize neoliberal regimes under which they live."

Steve Garner, *Texas A&M University, USA*

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INTRODUCTION

We met with Hibo on a summer day in 2015 in an outdoor café in Malmö, a city in southern Sweden, to talk about activism. She was engaged in an antiracist feminist group that consisted of mostly young but also a few middle-aged feminists racialised as non-white. We talked about the activities of the group, its ways of organising and relations to other local activist groups. After an outburst of drizzly rain, we moved inside the café to continue the discussion amidst music and noise from the coffee machine. When the interview was over and we were saying our goodbyes, Hibo returned to the question of what activism meant for her, saying: "It is about survival and love." These words crystallise the sentiments of many other activists too, with whom I talked during the following years about their participation in activism by those racialised as 'others' in the Nordic countries. This activism is about personal and collective survival but also about creating communities of social support and shared political agendas in order to work for social justice and futures beyond racial, gender and class hierarchies.

The group in which Hibo was active is part of the broad spectrum of civil society organisations and activist groups that mobilise on the basis of the shared position of being racialised as 'others' by the surrounding society, which I conceptualise as 'postethnic activism' in this book. Such activism has spread throughout the Nordic countries and profoundly altered public discussions on racism, antiracism and national belonging. While previous decades saw the establishment of many migrant and multicultural organisations, current activism differs from these in many ways. The recently formed groups are not focused on ethnic group membership or diasporic organising; instead, their focus is on the Nordic societies and the processes of racial, gender and class inequalities taking place within these, while connected to global raciality and neoliberal capitalism. A few of the organisations have a history dating back several decades, such as Afrosvenskarnas Riksorganisa- tion (The Afro-Swedish National Organisation) established in 1990, but the

overwhelming majority of the activist groups and organisations mobilising on the basis of a shared position as racialised 'others' have developed within the last decade. The upsurge has been fostered by the development of digital technology and social media, but its driving motor is the younger generation who were raised and (often) born in the Nordic region but are still treated as non-belonging to these countries.

This book examines the emerging forms of such political activism. Based on extensive interview, fieldwork and media data, it investigates the conditions, forms and visions of postethnic activism in three Nordic countries – Denmark, Sweden and Finland. In addition to providing empirical analyses of the activist scene and its organising, the book seeks to develop a theoretical understanding of the conditions of political activism in a time of neoliberal capitalism and an increasingly hostile environment towards migrants and racialised minorities. It examines the changing configurations of racial politics and efforts to articulate futures beyond racial, class and gender hierarchies, drawing upon theorising on the neoliberal turn in racial capitalism and the contextually specific histories of colonialism and racial thinking in different parts of Europe.

In the last two decades, European politics has been characterised by retreat from multiculturalism and an emphasis on 'core values' that migrants and racialised minorities are demanded to accept (e.g. Lentin and Titley, 2011; Kundnani, 2014). Moreover, authoritarian nationalism has been on the rise in the form of electoral support for right-wing populist parties and the presence of extreme right movements in the streets and on social media (e.g. Bhattacharyya et al., 2020; Norocel et al., 2020). This book analyses how, in this increasingly hostile environment and frequently occurring racist attacks, political activism is emerging that politicises race, class and gender in new ways. I argue that due to its border position connecting antiracist, feminist and class-based politics, postethnic activism can develop political agendas and social imaginaries that resonate beyond its immediate target groups and provide a basis for broader social justice politics.

The studied activism complicates, and to some extent questions, ongoing scientific discussions over the effects of neoliberalism on political mobilising and understandings of racial, classed and gendered inequalities. Many scholars have argued that race, gender and class-based inequalities are constructed as individual failures under neoliberalism, resulting in the de-politicising of social and economic powers (Winant, 2004; Brown, 2005, 2015; Goldberg, 2009, 2015; McRobbie, 2009; Roberts and Mahtani, 2010; Lentin and Titley, 2011; Boulila, 2020). This creates hindrances for political mobilisation, which is seen to be at risk of both fragmentation and co-optation by neoliberal ideologies. In her study on young activists in Canada, Jacqueline Kennelly (2011, p. 8) argues that "forces of neoliberalism are in many ways the antithesis of political engagement, premised as they are upon an ideology of individualised consumerism and meritocracy and the erosion of collective ties." She investigates the implications of neoliberal ideologies for young people's activism, emphasising state responses that distinguish 'good citizens' from 'bad activists' and the pressures of young activists to incorporate

themselves into the criteria of 'active citizenship.' My argument in this book is that while such processes characterise the public sphere and mainstream politics, new spaces of resistance, questioning and insurgence are simultaneously emerging, through which postethnic activists re-politicise questions of race, class and gender.

Connecting recent political changes to the long tradition of European colonialism, racial exclusions and global capitalism, this book discusses the specificities of the Nordic region and the implications of the countries' self-perceptions as champions of human rights, gender equality and egalitarianism for the way racism and racial inequalities are discussed in the studied countries. Nordic countries are usually viewed as outsiders to colonialism, defined by 'innocence' in relation to overseas colonialism and racial taxonomies (Keskinen et al., 2009; Loftsdóttir and Jensen, 2012). Recent scholarship has, however, shown that such 'innocence' is based on a widespread ignorance of the histories of colonialism, assimilation and repression of Indigenous people and racialised minorities, such as the Roma (Höglund and Burnett, 2019; Keskinen et al., 2019). I introduce the concept 'racial nordicisation' to refer to such historical legacies, as well as to the central role that welfare nationalism and gender equality ideologies play for the construction of national identities and the related othering of racialised minorities.

This book seeks to answer the following questions:

- What kind of communities of belonging are created in postethnic activism and how is the 'common' defined?
- How does neoliberalisation shape the contours of activism? How are neoliberal rationalities of individualisation and entrepreneurialism navigated, negotiated, questioned and resisted in postethnic activism?
- What kind of politics, organising and coalitions are developed in postethnic activism?
- How are notions of belonging, history, nation, and community featured in the activities and social imaginaries created by the activists? Can these, and to what extent, provide alternatives to the exclusionary nationalism and the (now embattled) liberal multiculturalism that characterise the public sphere?

Postethnic activism

In this book, I develop the concept 'postethnic activism' to cover different forms of activism in which mobilisation is based on being racialised as non-white or 'other' by the surrounding society. The notion 'postethnic' refers to how specific ethnic group membership is rendered irrelevant in the racialisation processes that cluster people as 'non-European,' 'immigrant' and 'different' based on phenotypic char-acteristics, culture[1] and religion, despite the fact that they were born and raised in the Nordic region. Thus, the activism that develops to challenge and transform such categorisations and exclusions is not based on ethnic origin, but sees the common ground in the processes of being racialised as non-white or 'other'. Nevertheless, postethnic activism as a concept acknowledges that different groups

are racialised in different ways and that the forms of mobilisation are multiple. 'Postethnic' as a concept also refers to politics that seeks to move away from community building based on nationality and ethnicity towards new configurations of belonging that acknowledge the importance of questions of race and racism in current societies, yet are not confined to racial logic. Instead, postethnic politics challenges racialising frames and seeks ways to move beyond them. It opens up a political space in which communities are created in action and through shared struggles.

In developing my understanding of postethnic activism, I have been inspired by Fatima El-Tayeb's (2011) study of European Others and the postethnic identity she sees emerging among queer of colour collectives and other minoritarian subjects in the urban neighbourhoods of Europe. El-Tayeb draws attention to the

> peculiar co-existence of, on the one hand, a regime of continent-wide recognised visual markers that construct non-whiteness as non-Europeanness with on the other [hand] a discourse of colour-blindness that claims not to 'see' racialised difference.
>
> *(2011, p. xxiv)*

Although Europe invented and exported the ideology of race to other parts of the world during the colonial era, today's European societies are characterised by colonial amnesia and reluctance to address the continued relevance of racial categorisations. Instead, most European countries have adopted the language of ethnicity to define national identity and belonging through ideas of shared culture and origin. Racialised minorities are perceived as 'immigrants' and outsiders to the nation even when several generations have been born and settled in these countries. El-Tayeb examines the emergence of 'postethnic identity' among young racialised minority and queer cultural activists, who question ethnicity as the basis of national belonging and create communities that depart from notions of purity and origin to instead focus on a mixing of genres, styles and belonging. According to El-Tayeb, this 'queering of ethnicity' creates new understandings of European identity and challenges the raceless understandings of European past and present.

I use the notion of 'postethnic' to refer to processes in which groups treated as racialised 'others' question the exclusionary notions of nation and national (un) belonging built on ethnic origin and cultural homogeneity, as well as create multi-ethnic and sometimes multiracial communities in an effort to tackle racial hierarchies and move towards a more socially just future. Moreover, by using the concept 'postethnic' I refer to the process of challenging the use of ethnicity as a euphemism for the unspoken racial differentiation that lies at the heart of Nordic national self-images (see Chapter 2). Unlike El-Tayeb (2011), I do not discuss postethnicity as an identity but approach the phenomenon as 'postethnic activism.' Rather than presuming a single identity shared by all the activists, I have been interested in the different ways the activists name the 'common' and create communities of belonging around these understandings. The shared activities and coming together of different groups are based on coalitional politics that build on an understanding of being racialised as non-white or 'other,' but this process involves multiple and sometimes tension-filled

identifications. Presuming a 'postethnic identity' could result in the bypassing of such differences and the work that is done (and needed) to establish coalitions. Furthermore, my approach to postethnic activism is less focused on cultural mixing and more attuned to the materialities of everyday struggles against racial, class and gender hierarchies.

The need to critically engage with the language of ethnicity lies also in its central role in the post-WWII tradition of antiracism, developed by international organisations such as UNESCO. In this tradition, the concept 'race' was declared unscientific and replaced by notions of 'ethnicity' and 'culture,' albeit not breaking with the idea of human differences (Lentin, 2004, pp. 74–85). The replacement provided ground for continued reifying of groups, now based on cultural distinctions. Many European states, including the Nordic countries, designed their policies and legislative measures to follow the UNESCO tradition. Therefore, ethnicity has substituted race as the commonly used term and educating people about different cultures is often presented as the main way to tackle racism. David Theo Goldberg (2009, pp. 154–160) argues that in post-WWII Europe race and racism were reduced to the horrors of the Holocaust and turned into exceptions. Race as a structuring logic and racism as a system were thought to be overcome when Nazi Germany was defeated. Thus, speaking about race in Europe has been and continues to be difficult. However, this also means that making race and racialisation processes visible involves radical potential. Movements that seek to address racism from the perspective of those targeted by it challenge the hegemony of colour-blindness and expose the limits of the language of ethnicity and liberal multiculturalism.

While many studies especially in the Anglo-American context use the concept 'antiracist activism' for the kind of mobilising discussed in this book, I find it useful to distinguish this activism from other forms of antiracism by using the concept 'postethnic activism.' This is due to the radical potential embedded in postethnic activism to challenge white hegemony and raceless understandings of Europe, as well as to centre the political claims of those racialised as non-white or 'others.' In emphasising the specificity of the struggles of Black and Brown communities, I side with the classical work of Paul Gilroy (1987) and the Black radical tradition (Johnson and Lubin, 2017). Nevertheless, it is important to acknowledge Alana Lentin's (2004, pp. 96–99) argument that anti-colonial movements and self-organised Black and minority organisations have had a huge impact on the whole field of antiracism, and an adequate understanding of antiracism as a phenomenon requires acknowledging these struggles. In this book, I view the impact of postethnic activism even more broadly than Lentin – it ranges from antiracist mobilising to other social and political movements, as well as to mainstream media and social media (see also Keskinen, 2018, 2021). Postethnic activism has affected the public sphere and political discussions in (parts of) the feminist movement, left-wing organisations, media and cultural workers, diversity and non-discrimination authorities, and a range of other civil society and public actors. The radical potential of this kind of activism thus extends the field of antiracism.

Racial capitalism and neoliberalisation

This book is not only an investigation of autonomous self-organising by those racialised as non-white or 'others' in the Nordic region, but is also about the changing conditions of political activism under neoliberal capitalism and the ways that activists navigate, negotiate, bend, challenge, resist and ignore the neoliberal rationalities of the public sphere. The book examines how the conditions of postethnic activism are characterised by increasing socio-economic inequalities and the withdrawal of the state from welfare services, as well as the neoliberal emphasis on individualisation and entrepreneurialism that shapes especially media communication and cultural work.

   I approach neoliberal capitalism as a form of racial capitalism or, as it has also been described, the neoliberal turn in racial capitalism (Osuna, 2017). Racial capitalism as a concept refers to "the role of racism in enabling the key moments of capitalist development" (Bhattacharyya, 2018, p. ix). As Cedric Robinson (2000, p. 2) argued, "the development, organisation, and expansion of capitalist society pursued essentially racial directions, so too did social ideology." Robinson's seminal work profoundly challenged the Eurocentric knowledge base of traditional Marxism, showing the relevance of slavery and imperialism to the development of capitalism and the need to expand the understanding of resistance to capitalism beyond the European proletariat. In his analysis, racism and capitalism did not so much "break from the old order but rather evolved from it to produce a modern world system of 'racial capitalism' dependent on slavery, violence, imperialism, and genocide" (Kelley, 2000, p. xiii). This tradition locates resistance in the history of Black radical movements and thinking, as well as in the current Black radicalism with its internationalist and coalition-building capacities (Johnson and Lubin, 2017). In this book, I stretch the understanding of resistance to racial capitalism beyond Black radicalism, to cover several kinds of postethnic activism and groups racialised in varying ways.

   Capitalism's ability to create and exploit differences has been identified by several researchers. As Lisa Lowe argues, differentiation is an essential part of capitalist logic: "capitalism expands not through rendering all labour, resources, and markets across the world identical, but by precisely seizing upon colonial divisions, identifying particular regions for production and others for neglect, certain populations for exploitation and still others for disposal" (Lowe, 2015, p. 150). A number of studies have shown how the racialisation of labour works to differentiate and divide the working class with the effect of securing the existing social order and power relations, but also how such divisions are overcome through shared struggles (e.g. Roediger, 1991, 2017; Lowe, 2007; Virdee, 2014, 2019). In addition to production, differentiation processes shape the sphere of circulation, consumer culture and corporate branding. While there is a tendency to standardisation and creation of consumer cultures that build upon the fantasy of global whiteness or white westernness, the malleability of capitalism likewise provides room for gaining profit through the commodification of difference (Bhattacharyya, 2018, pp. 158–162; Boulila, 2020). Not only are products today sold with appealing multiethnic and multiracial images, but corporations are also

quick to brand themselves as supporters of antiracist actions such as Black Lives Matter, when deemed suitable for their market interests.

As such, the dividing effects of racial capitalism are neither new nor original to the neoliberal turn, but the spread of precarious conditions of employment and future prospects that target multiple social groups, together with the increasing emphasis on individual responsibility and the erosion of social support structures, pose new questions for political mobilisation and resistance. Following Mustafa Dikeç (2007), I use 'neoliberalisation' as a concept that refers to the impact of neoliberalism on policies, rationalities and everyday lives. Neoliberalism is understood here as a narrower concept that refers to political-economic practices and thinking (Harvey, 2005). Thus, neoliberation is a concept that connects the implications of public cuts and the restructuration of welfare sector and urban spaces to rationalities emphasising individuality and entrepreneurialism through a focus on their effects on the everyday lives of those racialised as 'others.' However, I emphasise the agency of those living their everyday lives and mobilising for social change in the context of the neoliberal turn of racial capitalism. As especially Chapters 6 and 7 show, the activists respond to and navigate in multiple ways the neoliberalisation processes characteristic of the public sphere.

Scholarly discussions of the changing conditions of political action in neoliberal times have addressed the implications of neoliberalism from several angles – in regards to its effects on the spread of colour-blind ideology and postracialism (Goldberg, 2009, 2015; Bonilla-Silva, 2018), postfeminism (McRobbie, 2009), undoing of democracy (Brown, 2005, 2015), and the deepening of urban marginalisation (Roberts and Mahtani, 2010). Despite the differences in approach and focus, this research has identified the common trend of the de-politicisation of racial, class and gender inequalities, leading social relations and structural power to be addressed as the result of individual actions and personal failures. As Goldberg (2009, p. 339) argues, neoliberal actors aim to locate racialised preferences and actions behind a "wall of privacy, untouchable by state interventions, the outcome of which is to privatise race-based exclusions." However, such actions and societal trends are also confronted with resistance and efforts to rethink the private–public relation. As the analysis in this book shows, postethnic activists are re-politicising questions of race, class and gender in ways that have broad implications for the public sphere and understandings of the private–public relation.

Changing political contexts and increasing racial hostility

When developed from the 1970s onwards, multicultural policies were broadly criticised by antiracist actors and critical scholars for their essentialist notions of culture and the governing of difference (e.g. Gilroy, 1987; Hall, 2000/2018; Haider, 2018). However partial and inadequate the results were, multicultural policies were designed in a political context in which politicians deemed it necessary to respond to the demands presented by racialised minority communities and antiracist movements to broaden inclusivity and tackle racial hierarchies. In the last

two decades, multicultural rhetoric has been replaced by increasingly hostile and assimilatory language, creating a media and political context in which threats of expulsion or violence towards migrants and racialised minorities appear as part of the normality – more as extensions to it than breaking with the parameters of the political debate. Public debaters have declared the 'death' of multiculturalism and governments have introduced multiple measures to discipline especially Muslims but also other racialised minorities to comply with the 'core values' of European nations, defined around liberal notions of democracy, freedom of speech and gender equality (Grillo, 2007; Scott, 2009; Joppke, 2010). Such debates also developed terms like 'parallel societies' to refer to the social patterns and neigh-bourhoods of those racialised as 'others,' framing them as outsiders and problems that need to be 'dealt' with (Stehle, 2012).

Multiculturalism debates have become sites to ventilate ideas of race, culture, nation, and belonging while holding on to the colour-blind rhetoric and self-images that present the countries as having moved beyond the problematics of race (Lentin and Titley, 2011; Titley, 2019a; Boulila, 2020). As Lentin and Titley (2011, p. 3) argue, presenting multiculturalism "as a benevolent if somewhat naïve attempt to manage the problem of difference allows for securitised migration regimes, assimilative integrationism and neo-nationalist politics to be presented as nothing more than rehabilitative action." The spread of the discourse on the 'crisis' of multiculturalism throughout Europe, even to countries with meagre sets of multicultural policies and traditions of multicultural rhetoric (Vertovec and Wessendorf, 2010), indicates the resonance of the rehabilitative and corrective agenda all over the continent strug-gling with social tensions related to increasingly diverse populations, denial of racial hierarchies and rising socio-economic inequalities.

The simultaneous denial of racial divisions and the increasingly hostile politics towards those racialised as non-white or 'others' is characteristic of the current political moment in Europe. While this may seem paradoxical, it is better understood as an expression of the internal logic that allows European states to uphold the benevolent image of liberal democracy while strengthening the means to control, discipline and punish those marked out as the cause of societal tensions and anxieties. As such, it is a self-fuelling process that is unable to reduce the societal tensions at stake. Since the tensions result from a combination of increasingly diverse populations, denial of racialised hierarchies and neoliberal restructuration processes, they cannot be solved by controlling and punishing those deemed 'others.' Governments throughout Europe join in efforts to signal hostility and tougher measures. In the United Kingdom, 'go home' vans have been introduced to declare tough-ness towards and the undesirability of irregular migrants in the UK (Jones et al., 2017), whereas Danish governments have designed 'ghetto plans' to diminish the concentration of poor people and racialised minorities (often referring to the same group) in rental housing areas (Fallov and Birk, 2021).

The rising support for parliamentarian right-wing populism is certainly of impor-tance for the shift towards racialised hostility, but as the UK example shows such shifts in politics and public rhetoric take place even in contexts where right-wing populism

has no considerable or long-term presence in the parliament. Studies have indi-cated the relevance of the centre-right parties and parts of the left to the spread of neo-nationalist politics and the adoption of political demands initially proposed by right-wing populists (e.g. Gingrich and Banks, 2006; Hervik, 2011; Jørgensen and Thomsen, 2016). Political forces opposing the shift to the right and racialised hostility occupy seats in the parliaments of most European countries, but many of these parties are caught vacillating between the confined liberal multiculturalism and more radical antiracist standpoints.

The studied countries

The three countries studied in this book exemplify variations of the previously described European-wide developments. *Denmark*, in particular, has been a site for the spread of neo-nationalist politics, the broad influence of far right parties and racialised hostility especially towards Muslims since the beginning of the millennium. The political developments and agenda-setting role of the right-wing populist Danish People's Party (DPP) have provided examples and inspiration to other European populist parties. Through its position as the support party of the centre-right coalitions in power in 2001–2011 and 2016–2019, the DPP managed to place its goals of severely reduced immigration and harsh cultural assimilation at the forefront of Danish politics. The shift to the (far) right has resulted in the development of welfare chauvi-nist measures to determine the rights to welfare benefits based on cultural and ethnic criteria (Jørgensen and Thomsen, 2016) and the disciplining of racialised minorities and Muslims through policies that have led to extensive scrutiny of family life and intimacies (Keskinen, 2017). Politicians have also demanded performative confessions of confirmation to liberal values, such as freedom of speech, sexual freedom and gender equality, from Muslim minorities (Siim and Skjeie, 2008; Keskinen, 2012; Andreassen and Ahmed-Andresen, 2014). The Mohammed cartoon debates in 2005 lay the groundwork for repeated media controversies around free speech (Hervik, 2011) and the circulation of 'entitlement racism' (Essed and Muhr, 2018) – a self-perceived right to insult racialised minorities.

The Danish self-image is built on notions of being a nation of freedom-loving and tolerant citizens who have nurtured a critical stance towards authorities throughout the country's modern history (Mouritsen and Olsen, 2013). This tol-erant self-image seems undisturbed by the decades-long harsh immigration policies and the constant disciplining of racialised minority communities living within the Danish borders. While colour-blindness and racial silence have been the defining characteristics of the Danish public sphere, in the 2010s a move towards debating racism has taken place, involving a complex shift between 'racial turns' and 'returns' (Danbolt and Myong, 2019). These recent debates have centred around narrow definitions of racism and sought to delegitimise central Danish researchers working on questions of structural racism. Nevertheless, even in this harshly stig-matising atmosphere some racialised minority actors and groups have created spaces from which to present critical perspectives on racism and resistance towards the

repressive racial regime. Such perspectives have been visible especially in social media, but have sometimes been picked up by mainstream media too.

Anti-Muslim racism is especially pronounced in the Danish public debates, although visible in the two other studied countries too. The racialised minorities living in Denmark include a large share of migrants and their descendants from the Middle East and Pakistan, who feature frequently in the hostile political debates and policy making. Work-related migration in the 1960s and 1970s brought migrants from Turkey and Pakistan to Denmark, creating the basis of today's relatively large minority communities. With the refugee migration of the 1980s and 1990s the number of groups coming from, among others, Palestine and Lebanon, Iraq, Iran, former Yugoslavia and Somalia increased considerably. Altogether, 14 % of people living in Denmark are migrants or descendants, and two-thirds of them are from what statistics label as 'non-western countries' (Statistics Denmark, 2020).

If Danish immigration and integration policy is characterised by a highly restrictive model, *Sweden* is usually presented as its opposite – following a liberal model that builds on openness to transnational migration and diversity (Brochmann and Hagelund, 2011). Some clear differences exist in the policies of the two countries, such as their relationship to multiculturalism and cultural difference. The Swedish government adopted multicultural policies in the 1970s, while Danish governments have viewed cultural differences as a negative characteristic from the early periods of integration policy. Nevertheless, the practices and effects of integration policies in the two countries have not differed as much. In recent years, Sweden has moved closer to the restrictive model, when the government has tightened asylum policies and criminal policy has become the central response to social problems in racialised and marginalised urban areas (Sernhede et al., 2019). The liberal model and the rhetoric of openness to transnational migration was largely abandoned in Sweden in the aftermath of the 2015 large-scale migration, known as the Summer of Migration (Bojadžijev, 2018; Hess and Kasparek, 2019). Together with Germany, Sweden received the highest number of migrants in Europe, with over 160,000 people seeking refuge in Sweden in 2015. After an intensive public debate about the 'collapse' of the reception system and too many migrants entering Sweden, the government decided to radically tighten the criteria for asylum in November 2015. The law making residence permits time-limited for refugees, instead of the previous permanent residence permits, was first enacted as temporary but made permanent in 2021.

While not reaching the level of hostility that the Danish public debates on migration and racialised minorities have, Swedish political debates have been affected by the rising support for the right-wing populist party Sweden Democrats (SD) and the spread of racist language in social media and the public sphere more broadly. SD has built its political message on welfare chauvinist agendas and adopted gender equality as a means of racist exclusion (Norocel, 2013, 2016). Since 2019, the conservative party Moderaterna and the Christian-Democratic party have sought collaboration with SD, aiming to gain power after the elections in 2022. The parties have announced that they broadly share views on stricter policies in relation to immigration, integration and criminality.

At the time of my fieldwork, between 2015 and 2018, Swedish public debates were still characterised by a relatively strong antiracist discourse. In contrast to Denmark, antiracist, migrant and racialised minority voices have been an important part of the Swedish public sphere for decades. Even Swedish governments have declared themselves as antiracist, leading scholars to examine antiracism as a characteristic of the national self-image (Hübinette and Lundström, 2014). While part of the self-pronounced antiracism may indeed be non-performative (Ahmed, 2006), it has nevertheless provided more space for addressing racism and whiteness in the public sphere than has been the case in Denmark. The work of the postethnic activists, discussed in the following chapters, has brought experiences of racism and analyses of the structural aspects of racism into the media sphere and everyday discussions. Already in the first decade of 2000s, antiracist and racialised minority scholars were working hard to bring public attention to questions of (anti)racism through, for example, edited collections and official governmental reports presenting research on racism in Swedish society.

The earlier generous asylum policies and Sweden's reputation as a nation guided by the principle of solidarity have brought a high number of refugees to the country in the last few decades, adding to the extensive work-related migration of the 1960s and 1970s from countries like Finland and the former Yugoslavia. In 2020, 26 % of people living in Sweden were immigrants or descendants (Statistics Sweden, 2021). The largest group of foreign-born residents in Sweden come from Syria, followed by Iraq, Finland, Poland, Iran and Somalia.

Likewise, *Finland* has witnessed the rise of right-wing populism in the parliament since 2011, when the True Finns party gained a huge increase in electoral support with 19 % of the vote. The True Finns participated in the centre-right government in 2015–2017, but split into two parties in 2017. A group dissatisfied with leadership choices in the party congress established a new party, Blue Reform. Since then, the True Finns have become even more pronounced in their anti-immigration rhetoric and several of their politicians have been convicted of racist speech. In the wake of the Summer of Migration in 2015, extreme right groups such as the Soldiers of Odin were established to patrol the streets of Finnish cities claiming they were 'protecting' white Finnish women and girls (Keskinen, 2018). The assumed costs of migration have often united mainstream parties and right-wing populists to express concerns over the future of the generous welfare state (Keskinen, 2016).

The language of tolerance and multiculturalism was commonly adopted by Finnish authorities and mainstream politics from the 1990s onwards, but has more recently been challenged and partly replaced by a more radical antiracist discourse (Seikkula, 2020). This is largely the result of the postethnic activism, discussed in this book, which has brought questions of structural racism, whiteness and racialisation to mainstream public discussions. The centre-left government that came into power in 2019 has prepared an action plan on racism and emphasised questions of non-discrimination more strongly than previous governments. In the wake of the Summer of Migration, a welcoming culture and solidarity activism to support the struggles of newly arrived migrants with Finnish administrative bureaucracy developed among certain parts of the population.

Migration to Finland took place later than to Sweden or Denmark. The first refugee groups came from Chile in the 1970s, followed by refugees from Vietnam. However, migration on a broader scale only started at the beginning of the 1990s with refugees arriving from Somalia, Iraq, Iran and the former Yugoslavia. The 1990s were also the starting point of the repatriation of the Ingrian people[2] and other migrants from Russia. Work-related migration especially from neighbouring Estonia developed after the enlargement of the EU. In 2020, persons with a foreign background[3] in Finland consisted of 8 % of the population, with the largest groups coming from the Former Soviet Union, Estonia, Iraq, Somalia, Former Yugoslavia, China and Vietnam (Statistics Finland, 2021).

Structure of the book

Having laid out the context for the book in the introductory chapter, I continue with a discussion on the histories of colonialism and racial formations characteristic of the Nordic region in Chapter 2. This chapter outlines the theoretical basis and historical background of how race, racism and politics are approached in the book. It elaborates the concept and understanding of 'racial nordicisation,' building on a regional approach to colonial and racial histories, as well as their legacies for today's societies. The chapter further connects 'racial nordicisation' to the broader frame of 'racial europeanisation.'

Chapter 3 introduces the material and method on which the analysis of the book is based. It describes what kind of research material was included, how it was gathered and how the activists were contacted. The chapter discusses the translocal approach adopted in the study and its relation to a comparative, nation-state-centred analysis. Furthermore, the chapter discusses the methodological and ethical choices of the research, as well as examining the implications of my own positionalities for the collection of data and the production of knowledge.

Chapter 4 analyses how postethnic activists create communities of belonging and identify the 'common' around which to build groups and activities. It highlights the importance of developing autonomous spaces, in which activists racialised as non-white or 'others' are able to take control over the formulation of central political questions, set the boundaries of the community, and define the representations of themselves; in other words, becoming political subjects and challenging the white hegemony of the Nordic societies. The chapter identifies five main forms of postethnic activism in the studied countries and examines how the 'common' is understood in each of these. The chapter argues for the strength of the multiple ways of organising within postethnic activism, since it allows for recognition of similar experiences and oppressive mechanisms, while also providing ground for coalitional politics.

Chapter 5 examines how the activists mobilise and organise around three kinds of politics: the politics of social justice, survival and revolutionary love. Firstly, it shows how the activists work for the creation of social justice, through a critique of racism, class-based inequalities, sexism, hetero- and cis-normativity, as well as

developing initiatives that aim for social change. Secondly, it examines the politics of survival as a form of resistance, self-care and healing that is necessary in the violent environment of white hegemony, structural racism and political hostility. Thirdly, the chapter looks at how the activists seek to develop a politics of revolutionary love, which addresses the ways of living together, building affectionate relations through activism, and working together for radical global change. The chapter further analyses the tactics and strategies of the activists, ranging from separatism to inclusion, and the possibilities this opens for cooperation with other social justice movements.

Chapter 6 analyses how the activists seek to change representations of their communities, families and racialised minority subjects, as well as challenge white normativity through cultural work. The scope and possibilities for such activities have broadened extensively with the development of digital media. Many activists also work with arts, journalism and other cultural work, combining activism with professional work. For some, activism has become a stepping-stone for contributions and work in mainstream newspapers, magazines and public broadcasting. The chapter examines how the activists navigate in the terrain of cultural work, where they are both invited in as 'exciting radical young persons' but also subjected to the racialised, classed and gendered power relations of the cultural sector. Activists who develop their own media sites or produce podcasts, videos and other cultural products are also confronted with questions of funding, commercialism and consumer culture. The chapter investigates the different ways of responding to such pressures, as well as the ongoing (self-)critical discussions among activists about neoliberal capitalism.

Chapter 7 examines neoliberalisation from the perspective of activism in the racialised and marginalised urban areas that in Sweden and Finland are called suburbs and in Denmark 'ghettos.' Neoliberal policies have resulted in deepening socio-economic inequalities, as well as an emphasis on securitisation and 'law and order' politics with multiple effects on these residential areas. However, the neighbourhoods are also sites of lively political and cultural activism. The activists organise resistance towards the privatisation of housing, securitisation of poverty and stigmatisation of the marginalised suburbs. They criticise the racialisation of criminality and the increasing presence of the police in the suburbs. The activist groups also host cultural events and art exhibitions. The chapter further analyses the pressures to gather funding and cooperate with municipal actors, as well as the effects of 'NGOisation' on urban activism.

Chapter 8 analyses the social imaginaries created in postethnic activism. It builds on the idea of the 'politics of imagination' to grasp how postethnic activism involves a creative and transformative element. The chapter argues that the activists are developing new social imaginaries through a focus on 'the past in the present' and 'the future in the present,' as well as dreaming about the future as an open space, detached from the existing racial, classed and gendered hierarchies.

Chapter 9 concludes with a discussion on the position and impact of postethnic activism in the racial politics of the studied countries. It further discusses the radical

potential of postethnic activism to bridge between other progressive social movements, such as feminist movements, other antiracist actors and leftist organisations. Moreover, the chapter discusses the implications of the neoliberal turn in racial capitalism to postethnic activism and the re-politicisation of race, class and gender hierarchies.

Notes

1 In racialisation processes, phenotypic characteristics are often connected to assumptions of cultural 'otherness' (Murji and Solomos, 2005).
2 Ingrians are an ethnic Finnish group who lived in the area around St. Petersburg in Russia. Before and after WWII they were targeted by forced deportations and executions in the Soviet Union. In 1990 the Finnish president Mauno Koivisto opened up the country for the repatriation of Ingrians and their descendants to Finland.
3 This statistical category includes all those born outside Finland or where both parents or the only known parent were born outside Finland.

2

RACIAL NORDICISATION AND RACIAL POLITICS

Introduction

The understandings of race and the forms that racism takes vary in different geo-graphical and temporal locations. In this chapter, I examine the societal context in which postethnic activism in the Nordic region takes place and situate it in the broader European and global processes. I also outline the theoretical approach to race and racism that this book draws upon. I understand activism and social movements as part of racial politics, which is central for how racial formations are shaped in specific national contexts (Omi and Winant, 2015). Racial politics is the connecting link between everyday lives, economic relations, institutions and cul-tural meanings. It involves constant struggles between differently positioned actors, who seek to advance their understandings and preferred ways of organising resources, resulting in racial formations located in time and space.

In the European context, the Nordic countries are often left out when exam-ining colonialism and racial histories. Discussing the transnational entanglements and intra-European hierarchies that European colonialism and racial thinking have led to, Manuela Boatcă (2021) makes a distinction between West Europe as the hegemonic centre and South and East Europe as its internal 'others.' According to her, the hierarchy between the 'heart' of Europe and the (perceivably) less modern and underdeveloped South and East Europe dates back to the 17th century, but has been strengthened by more recent processes, such as the enlargement of the European Union. Interestingly, Boatcă leaves out the Northern part of Europe from her analysis. This example is not the only one of its kind. Until recently, the image of the Nordic countries (Sweden, Denmark, Norway, Finland and Iceland) has not involved participation in the colonial project or the need to investigate national histories in regards to racism. Instead, the self-images and nation-branding strategies of the Nordic countries have been framed around being pioneers of

women's suffrage, peace building and the development of the so-called Nordic welfare model, with its generous welfare benefits and care services. More recently, this 'innocent' image has been severely challenged by scholars, who have identified the multiple entanglements of the Nordic countries with the colonial project and argued for the need to locate Nordic histories in the global histories of colonialism and racism.

In this chapter, I first discuss the benefits of a regional approach to race and racism. I develop the concept 'racial nordicisation' to make sense of the 'innocent' self-images of the Nordic countries, their material bases, and the marginalised histories and collective experiences that are ignored in such nation-building processes. The chapter ends with a discussion of how racial formations are created through racial politics.

Racial regionalisations

Building on a regional approach to race and racism, my aim is to distinguish the main characteristics of the spatio-historical processes and trajectories taking place in the Nordic region. I develop the concept 'racial nordicisation' to grasp both the specificities of the Nordic region and its relationality to broader European histories and current racisms. I build on David Theo Goldberg's (2009) discussion of 'racial regionalisations,' which he defines as:

> typologies of regionally prompted, parametered, and promoted racisms linked to their dominant state formations. I am suggesting regional models or really mappings rather than ideal types, broad generalisations as contours of racist configuration, each one with its own material and intellectual history, its prior conditions and typical modes of articulation. They are often interactive historically, overlapping landscapes. But it remains nevertheless revealing to delineate them, to distinguish one kind and style as well as their conditions of possibility, expressions, effects, and implications from another.
>
> (Goldberg, 2009, p. 66)

In his study, Goldberg identifies five regional typologies, based on an analysis of racial histories and the arrangement of racial relations. One of these racial configurations, which Goldberg names 'racial europeanisation,' is of particular interest to my study. Typical for the European modality of race and racism is that it builds on a denial of the relevance of colonial histories for today's societies. European racial history is defined in a narrow sense as the process that led to the Holocaust (Shoah). When colonialism and racism are addressed, they are described as characteristics of the past. Criticism towards racism and racial inequities in the present is often aggressively denied and confronted as outrageous accusation (Titley, 2019a). The former European colonial powers have camouflaged themselves in 'white amnesia' (Hesse, 1997) and 'white innocence' (Wekker, 2016), reproducing narratives of small nation-states that struggle in competition with other often more powerful European states.

When the former colonial powers address colonialism, it tends to be in a benevolent and paternalistic manner. Benefits to the colonised countries and the mission to civilise their populations is emphasised, while the extractivist, exploitative and violent nature of the colonial project is minimised. Even the UK, with its large empire and long tradition of anticolonial and antiracist mobilising, has only superficially addressed the colonial legacies and largely presents itself in a nation-state framework instead of thoroughly investigating the effects of the imperial past (Bhambra and Holmwood, 2018). When racism is acknowledged, as in the memorialisation of the Holocaust, it is predominantly done through a partial narrative that only provides visibility to its Jewish victims, while the losses of the Roma, gay and lesbian communities, the disabled and the communists, for example, are ignored. More profound analyses of, for example, how colonial elimination and eugenics movements in European countries paved the way for the exterminatory logic that Nazi-Germany put in practice are seldom engaged with.

While these ideologies and social structures characterise countries across Europe, the expressions of racism also differ within Europe. Race and racism are shaped by the varying experiences of colonialism and empire, nation-building processes, histories of scientific racism, past and present migration patterns, racialised minorities living within national borders, processes related to industrialisation and de-industrialisation, state ideologies and political histories in different European countries (Goldberg, 2009, p. 177). Critical analyses have also investigated the perception of Europe as white and Christian, often used to establish an image of Europe as the 'cradle of civilisation' (Lewis, 2005, 2006), while embedded in exclusionary notions of secularism, tolerance and democracy. To understand current racisms requires an investigation of the long history of Islamophobia in large parts of Europe and its encounters with Muslims within and beyond the continent.

Concomitantly, Steve Garner (2017) has argued for the usefulness of a regional approach in his examination of recent research on whiteness and its future prospects. He points out that white 'habituses' vary across settler colonies known as the former Dominions of the British Empire, but also that an analysis of the (post)colonial tensions and the present social relations of many countries in Asia, Africa and Latin America can only be understood through their historical layers. Analysing national identities, politics and cultural practices through the lens of whiteness and postcolonialism has also brought new knowledge about the past and present of the Nordic societies.

Racial nordicisation

'Racial nordicisation' is a variation and specific configuration of 'racial europeanisation.' Many of the characteristics described above likewise apply to racial nordicisation. 'White innocence' and 'white amnesia' are just as widespread in the Nordic countries as in other European countries. Nevertheless, the Nordic region also has its own characteristics and variations of the European racial trajectories and structures. I identify three defining points of racial nordicisation: (1) claims of having been outsiders to colonialism and racial histories; (2) notions of being

exemplary bearers of the egalitarian tradition and welfare state arrangements; and (3) convictions of gender equality being a defining feature of politics and social relations, creating a specific kind of superiority both in relation to non-western countries and other European countries. A closer analysis shows that these claims are at best partial and at worst distortions of the past and present social realities in the region.

The common understanding of the Nordic countries as bearing no relationship to colonial and racial relations is often argued for by the fact that, unlike Britain or France, the countries were not large-scale empires with colonies on several continents. Such arguments also point out that Iceland, Norway and Finland were part of larger empires and kingdoms for many centuries before gaining independence in the 20th century. Notwithstanding such evidence, research has identified multiple engagements of the Nordic societies with the colonial project and the varying roles these countries played in the history of racism, which bear relevance to their present ways of dealing with ethnic and racial diversity.

Denmark was an overseas empire, with centuries' long colonisation of the Danish Virgin Islands in the Caribbean; Greenland, the Faroe Islands and Iceland in the North Atlantic; and a few smaller colonies in India and West Africa. The Danish imperial histories and engagement with the trade and exploitation of enslaved people have been largely silenced and ignored in national histories, but Danish colonialism has also been presented as 'benevolent' and 'peaceful' compared to that of the other European powers (Jensen, 2015). The Danish Virgin Islands were sold to the US in 1917, after two centuries of Danish colonisation. Even today, the Danish (post)colonial rule over Greenland and the Faroe Islands continues, despite their relative administrative autonomy.

The second regional power, Sweden, ruled the colony Cabo Corso, the Swedish Gold Coast, in West Africa for a short period in the 17th century and colonised the island St. Barthélemy in the Caribbean in the late 18th century. The capital of St. Barthélemy, Gustavia, was a lively transit harbour for the transatlantic and Caribbean trade of enslaved people (Weiss, 2016). As was the case with the Danish Virgin Islands, slavery was a central feature of the economy at St. Barthélemy under Swedish rule, which lasted until 1878. Finland was part of the Swedish Kingdom until 1809 and the Russian Empire until its independence in 1917, but Finnish enterprises, missionary work and individual people participated in the Swedish and broader European colonial endeavours in the Caribbean, North and South America, and Africa (Keskinen, 2019).

Simultaneously with the colonial aspirations towards overseas territories, the Danish-Norwegian and Swedish-Finnish Kingdoms strengthened their hold on the northern areas of Scandinavia, where the Indigenous Sámi people live, and Greenland, the land of the Inuits. The economic resources of the north attracted mining companies and farming settlers, encouraged by state decrees that sanctioned settlement in Sámi areas. The settler colonial logic of elimina-tion resulted in both cultural and economic dissolution, pushing the Indigenous Sámi to dwindling land areas and leading to a gradual destruction of the Sámi

languages and culture (Kuokkanen, 2020). With the emergence of the modern state, assimilatory and repressive policies were also directed at other ethnicised and racialised minorities in the region, notably the Roma, Travellers, Jews and the Tatars, a Muslim group of Russian origin living in Finland (Keskinen, 2019). The ideologies and processes of creating an ethnically and racially homogeneous nation-state played a central role for the assimilation and repression of minorities from the 19th century onwards (Keskinen et al., 2019).

Racial nordicisation consists of a wide denial of such histories of colonialism, settler colonialism and repression of minorities that do not fit into the ideology of the culturally and racially homogeneous nation. Exceptionalist narratives of the 'innocent' Nordic countries and their inhabitants (Keskinen et al., 2009; Loftsdóttir and Jensen, 2012; Sawyer and Habel, 2014; Rastas 2019a) have whitewashed the varying levels of complicity, active involvement and even pioneering positions in the colonial and racial projects that the countries performed. One example of this pioneering role can be found in the history of scientific racism and eugenics, in which Sweden especially had a prominent role. The State Institution of Racial Biology established in Sweden in 1922 was a leading authority internationally in the (pseudo)scientific theorising and measuring of the racial characteristics of human populations (Hübinette and Lundström, 2014). Moreover, the practice of human exhibitions was common in Denmark in the late 19th and early 20th centuries. In over 50 exhibitions, people from the Danish Virgin Islands and European colonies in Africa and Asia were presented at the Copenhagen Zoo for Danish audiences for what were described as entertainment and learning purposes (Andreassen, 2016).

The second element of racial nordicisation makes visible how past and present racism is intertwined with the ideologies and institutions of the welfare state. Nordic national self-images are centred around the narrative of the egalitarian welfare state that aims to level out socio-economic inequalities and provide services to all citizens alike. This Nordic welfare model (Esping-Andersen, 1990) was established by the social democratic and agrarian parties from the 1930s onwards, arriving in its 'golden age' in the decades after WWII. Sweden and Denmark were the early developers of the model and the Swedish notion of the state as the 'people's home' (*folkhemmet*) became a symbol of the class consensus embedded in and the caring nature of the model. Finland followed in the footsteps of the other Nordic countries with most legislative changes and welfare services established as late as in the 1960s and 1970s.

For some decades, the Nordic model was successful in reducing income and wealth disparities within the countries. However, the economic recession of the 1990s paved the way for neoliberal policies that have restructured the model in profound ways, increasing the share of the privatised welfare and educational sector and implementing New Public Management practices in the public sector (Schierup et al., 2006; Kamali and Jönsson, 2019). The fiscal basis of the welfare state has suffered from years of tax reductions and the income and wealth inequalities have considerably increased, making evident the racial and class divisions of the societies (Ålund et al., 2017; Suhonen et al., 2021). Despite the

institutional restructuration and the erosion of the fiscal basis, the welfare state is widely nurtured as a vision and ideology especially in Sweden and Finland. Denmark, on the other hand, has a history of less state-centred political traditions that emphasise free thought and civil society as a counter force to the state (Mouritsen and Olsen, 2013). Nevertheless, even in Denmark the welfare state has been a central vision for egalitarian aspirations especially among social democrats and other leftist actors.

The welfare state also has a darker side that shows the intertwinement of race and class with that of biopolitics and nationalism. Analysing the Swedish welfare state, Barker argues that from its beginning the welfare state was intimately tied to nationalism:

> the welfare state was part and parcel of a national project that attached individuals to the fate of the nation, as their sense of belonging, sense of national identity was wrapped around the welfare state and its success, contributing to a kind of ontological investment in the welfare state.
>
> *(2018, p. 33)*

The biopolitical project, which aimed to ensure the 'good quality' and racial hygiene of the population, involved state-led eugenics policies and sterilisation programmes that lasted from the late 1920s to the late 1960s (Broberg and Roll-Hansen, 1996). Those deemed mentally ill, socially deviant and unable to take care of their children were convinced by authorities or forced to accept expert decisions of sterilisation, with a disproportionate number of poor, working class and members of for example the Roma minority targeted by such policies. The worries over 'racial degeneration' and its impact on the future of the nation were widespread among both right wing and social democratic politicians between the World Wars, but support for such thinking largely decreased after WWII, although the sterilisation programmes continued running for another two decades.

In the decades following WWII, the previous focus on race gave way to an ideology of colour-blindness. As in most other European countries, ethnicity replaced race as a central category of defining difference. Welfare state institutions and practices were built around the aim of treating everybody in a similar manner, following the universalist tradition. While this ideology resulted in the establishment of a comprehensive school system, tuition-free higher education and student benefits that enabled even working class students to gain higher education, it also had a strong assimilatory effect. Especially Indigenous scholars have evidenced how the welfare state institutions, notably in education and social and health care sectors, played a central role in the assimilatory processes and the concomitant erosion of Indigenous cultures (e.g. Kuokkanen, 2007, 2020). In Finland, the welfare state also adopted repressive policies towards the Roma minority, taking into care a large portion of Roma children and placing them in children's homes in the 1950s and 1960s (Keskinen, 2019).

That the welfare state has been and continues to be closely tied up with the nationalist project makes it easy for politicians who seek to restrict migration and

condition welfare benefits on the basis of national belonging to draw upon worries over its future (Norocel, 2016). This is especially visible in the ideology of welfare nationalism – which focuses on welfare-related national interest and connects welfare provision to national membership – and its extension welfare chauvinism, which seeks to restrict welfare 'only to our own' on the basis of ethnonationalist and racialising criteria (Keskinen, 2016). In the neoliberal age with broad anxieties over how many the welfare state can care for, national belonging and welfare provision have become powerful tools for right-wing populists and conservative politicians, and even some left-wing actors, to create hierarchies between the 'deserving' white working class and 'undeserving' migrants and their descendants.

The third element of racial nordicisation is the emphasis given to gender equality as a feature of Nordic societies and their social relations. It is evident that the Nordic countries achieve top positions in many international rankings on the share of women in politics and employment, as well as in terms of public childcare and generous parental leave legislation (e.g. World Economic Forum, 2020), which stand out even in many European comparisons. Nevertheless, the perception of exceptional commitment to gender equality is also taken up in national branding and subsumed into nationalist ideologies, leading to a racialised division between the gender equal Nordic people and the patriarchal 'others' from outside Europe/the West (de los Reyes et al., 2002; Keskinen et al., 2009; Lähdesmäki and Saresma, 2014). In such images, gendered power relations and violence are projected onto the non-white 'others,' who are seen to embody the 'bad patriarchies' imported from other parts of the world to the inherently gender equal Nordic countries.

A large part of the racialised debates on 'bad patriarchies' and 'good gender equality' have centred around Islam and the Muslim populations living in the Nordic region. In Denmark, the public debates have focused on forced marriages and honour-related violence in Muslim families, which have been used as arguments to tighten family reunification policies (e.g. Siim and Skjeie, 2008; Schmidt, 2011). Moreover, Muslim women's covering of hair and other body parts has been at the centre of media and political debates, circulating ideas of the perceived oppression of women in minoritised contexts and resulting in restrictive legislation over some forms of bodily coverage of Muslim women (Andreassen and Lettinga, 2012). In Sweden, the focus has been on honour-related violence and control of young women in the name of honour, following a few widely covered killings of young women with a family background in the Middle East in the early 2000s (Keskinen et al., 2009; Alinia, 2020). In Finland, public discussions have focused on sexual violence and sexual harassment performed, or assumed to be performed, by migrant men (e.g. Keskinen, 2012, 2018). Discourses of gendered violence and perceived oppression of women within racialised minority communities are widespread also within Finnish society (Peltola et al., 2017; Honkatukia and Keskinen, 2018).

Examining the forms and expressions of racisms across the Nordic region shows many similarities with those of racial europeanisation. Nevertheless, race and racism are even more strongly denied with reference to having never been part of the colonial project and, thus, racism is not perceived to be a problem for the Nordic

societies. Instead, the problem is often located in the increasing diversity, presented as a result of the post–1960s migration from outside Europe, and the following challenges to cultural homogeneity and the welfare economy (Keskinen et al., 2019). Furthermore, a characteristic of specific importance for how race and racism operate in the Nordic region is connected to the role of the welfare state, as part of the nationalist and racialising project of belonging but also in the anxieties over its future capacity to provide services and redistribute wealth. Lastly, racial nordicisation is defined by a strong emphasis on gender equality and the creation of hierarchical divisions between groups racialised as non-white and white majority populations.

Racial formations and racial politics

Racial formation theory interprets racial politics as the driving force of how racial significations and structures develop in certain societies. In their groundbreaking work, Michael Omi and Howard Winant (2015, p. 109) define racial formation as "the sociohistorical process by which racial identities are created, lived out, transformed and destroyed." They detect how the meanings of race are created and change in time and space, as well as how ideas of race structure societies through culture, economy, politics and everyday lives. I understand race as a classificatory system that is articulated with other systems of power (Hall, 2017; Lentin, 2020, p. 5). It intersects with other axes of inequality, notably class, gender and sexuality. Race signifies social relations and different interests related to these through a reference to bodily differences (Omi and Winant, 2015). Understandings of race and racialising processes also build on cultural characteristics that intertwine with bodily distinctions, (re)producing hierarchical divisions and legitimising power differences (Molina, 2005; Murji and Solomos, 2005). Scholars have discussed the strong emphasis on cultural differences in the media and politics since the 1980s as 'neo-racism' (Balibar, 1991; Hervik, 2011), but the concept has also been criticised on the grounds that cultural elements have been part of racial ideologies and racialising processes for many centuries. Notwithstanding, the move towards an increasing focus on and essentialisation of cultural differences while at the same time race is hidden in the metonymical language of postracialism is central for analyses of, for example, anti-Muslim racism (Lentin and Titley, 2011; Elliott-Cooper, 2018).

  Importantly, racial formation is created through processes that connect social structures and signification. Omi and Winant (2015) develop the concept 'racial project' to examine the ideological and practical work involved in making connections between meanings and societal structures. For example, in working life this can mean that representatives of employers who recruit staff often have racialised perceptions of the skills and capacities of different migrant groups, which strengthens hierarchical differentiation processes in the labour market. According to Omi and Winant (2015, p. 125), "a racial project is simultaneously an interpretation, representation, or explanation of racial identities and meanings, and an effort to organise and distribute resources (economic, political, cultural) along particular racial lines." Thus, racial

projects can take place on several levels of the society. They can be identified in policy making, economy and politics, but they also shape the everyday lives of people and their personal experiences.

My interest is especially in how the sphere of politics is deemed central for the shaping of the racial formation. As the discussion on racial capitalism in Chapter 1 shows, I view political economy essential for how racial formations develop and change. However, economic processes should be understood in relation to 'racial projects' and 'racial politics,' which bring human agency into theorising on racism. Omi and Winant (2015, p. 138) argue that racial politics is a driving force of upholding the status quo and creating social change. Their view of racial politics gives a prominent role to the state, its institutions and policies, but they also include collective action, civil society mobilising and identity construction in their conceptualisation of racial politics. Instead of focusing on racial regimes (Mulinari and Neergaard, 2017) or on party politics, my main interest is the impact of social movements, resistance and insurgence of antiracist mobilisation on racial politics. The idea of racial politics allows us to place postethnic activism in the context of, and involved in multiple relations with, state policies and institutions; media representations and political debates in the public sphere; NGOs and other social justice movements. It is also important to acknowledge the broad spectrum of social movements (Massoumi et al., 2017), among which, for example, autonomous activist groups, locally based organisations and large established NGOs may have different agendas and relationships to public authorities.

My analysis of postethnic activism is also inspired by the discussion on political subjectivity and the creation of the 'common' that has taken place in connection with the concept of multitude. Michael Hart and Antonio Negri (2004, p. 100) make a distiction between identity-based notions, which reduce social differences into one category, and multitude as "an internally different, multiple social subject whose constitution and action is based not on identity or unity" but "on what it has in common." As an example of identity-based notions we can think of how people are understood in a nation-state context, building on ideas of unity and sameness, while setting aside and repressing differences. Instead, thinking of social movements from the perspective of plurality and multiplicity (multitude) highlights differences as a building block of political action. This multiplicity does not mean fragmentation or incoherence. Multitude is an internally differentiated social subject that is created through processes of recognising and producing the common. The production of the common is not arbitrary, but reflects the social conditions that create the potential for collective struggles. Political struggles are, nevertheless, central and even in similar social conditions political responses may vary – from adaptation and internalisation to resistance and profound challenging of the hierarchical race, class and gender orders.

The notion of multitude emphasises that the common is not just somewhere to be found, it is produced in social processes. It is intertwined with the production of subjectivity in what Hart and Negri (2004) describe as a spiral: cooperation and communication produce political subjectivity, which in turn produces new forms of cooperation and communication, creating understandings and acts of the

common. My aim in this book is much narrower than that of Hart and Negri's, who seek to identify the subject of resistance to neoliberal globalisation. However, I find their theorising inspiring when thinking about postethnic activism and seeking to grasp both its internal differentiation and the production of the common. In the following chapters, I examine the production of the common within the different forms and across the field of postethnic activism (Chapter 4), as well as the possibilities of producing the common in shared struggles with other social justice movements (Chapter 5).

Conclusions

Building on a regional approach to race and racism (Goldberg, 2009; Garner, 2017), this chapter has identified both the specificities of the Nordic region and its relation to the broader European trajectories in terms of colonialism and racism. I have discussed this as 'racial nordicisation,' which is a variation of the racial configuration 'racial europeanisation.' Racial nordicisation refers to three main elements in the construction of Nordic superiority in relation to both the non-white 'others' and the rest of Europe. Firstly, it includes notions of the Nordic countries as 'innocent' outsiders to colonialism and racism as historical phenomena, but also in relation to present forms of racism and racial thinking. Thus, both the existing histories of overseas colonialism and the repression of Indigenous people and minorities, such as the Roma, as part of modern nation building in the Nordic region are denied. Secondly, racial nordicisation refers to the central role that welfare nationalism and ideologies of the egalitarian welfare state play in exclusionary notions of the nation-state. Thirdly, racial nordicisation addresses the implications of gender equality in the construction of national identities and hierarchies in relation to migrants and racialised minorities.

This chapter has also discussed racial politics as a central force shaping racial formations (Omi and Winant, 2015). It has outlined racial politics as the interplay between the state, public institutions and policies, collective action, civil society and processes of identity construction. It has emphasised the usefulness of the idea of racial politics for the understanding of postethnic activism in the context of state policies, media representations, political debates in the public sphere, NGOs and other social movements. I have also introduced the concept of the racial project that refers to the ideological and practical work required to make connections between meanings and societal structures. The chapter ends with a discussion of postethnic activism as an internally differentiated and multiple field of political struggle and organising, through which political subjectivity and notions of the common are produced.

3

METHODOLOGICAL ROUTES

Introduction

This book is based on extensive fieldwork and interviews in five big cities in three Nordic countries: Copenhagen in Denmark, Malmö and Stockholm in Sweden, and Helsinki and Turku in Finland. I have also collected a large body of textual material from social media, newspapers and magazines, which adds to the face-to-face gathered material. The main part of the material was collected in 2015–2018, while a few interviews were conducted in 2019–2020. Thus, the material reflects a time period around and after the large-scale migration of autumn 2015, with its initial 'welcoming culture' (Bojadžijev, 2018) and the tightening of border policies and increasingly hostile politics soon following (see Chapter 1). Especially in Sweden and Finland, it also reflects a period of heightened public visibility for postethnic activists and racialised minority authors and artists, who have introduced new themes and perspectives to the media and political agenda. Thus, the book makes visible the background to the large-scale Black Lives Matter demonstrations in the summer of 2020 and describes the multiple forms of postethnic activism that preceded it.

In this chapter, I outline the different kinds of materials and methods used in the analysis, as well as discussing the methodological and ethical choices made during the research process. The chapter first discusses the implications of a translocal approach to studying postethnic activism. Furthermore, I examine the politics of connectivity and the implications of my own positionalities on the collection of material and the analysis process. The chapter concludes with a discussion of the challenges of disrupting racial categorisations while studying (anti)racism and the implications of research ethics.

Translocal studies on postethnic activism

The wide critique of methodological nationalism, especially in migration and globalisation studies, has pointed out the need to question the self-evident focus on nation-states and instead draw upon perspectives that examine everyday lives in and across different localities (e.g. Wimmer and Glick Schiller, 2003; Datta and Brickell, 2011). This understanding of spatiality, articulated around the concept of translocality, directs the attention towards the embeddedness of everyday lives in and the connectivities between places. By adopting a translocal approach, my aim has been to highlight the role of local struggles and the creation of communities of belonging through activism, but also to draw attention to how connections between different activist groups and postethnic mobilisations are created across geographic localities. Rather than taking the national context as a starting point and conducting comparisons between activism in the three studied countries, I have been interested in the local ways of organising and the translocal points of connection and mobilisation.

The chosen localities include the capital areas in the three countries (Copenhagen, Stockholm and Helsinki), which are all sites of vibrant activism, art and media production. The study could have examined postethnic activism in each country by just focusing on these localities. However, in order to grasp a broader range of living environments and activism in cities outside the metropolitan areas the research examined activism in two other cities: Malmö, which has around 350,000 inhabitants and is one of the most diverse cities in Sweden, as well as hosting a lively activist scene; and Turku, a city on the south-west coast of Finland with around 200,000 inhabitants that has a high share of foreign-born inhabitants, next to the capital area.

When I started the fieldwork and interviews in Copenhagen and Malmö in the first half of 2015, my aim was to focus on two kinds of activism – firstly, feminist and queer of colour activism, and secondly, urban activism in racialised and marginalised neighbourhoods. While both kinds of activism were taking place in these two localities and I met many inspiring activists involved in such groups, it also became clear that the range of postethnic activism was much broader. If I wanted to discuss postethnic activism on a more general scale and not just two kinds of activism that were part (albeit an important part) of it, I thought I had to extend the scope of activism to other groups. This decision led to the understanding of postethnic activism that is examined in detail in Chapter 4, with a focus on the different forms of activism and the participants' understandings of the 'common.'

Moving on to do fieldwork in Stockholm during the first six months of 2016, I sometimes felt overwhelmed by the number of activist groups, media sites and events organised, wondering whether it would have been better to restrict the scope of activism and engage on a more long-term basis with some groups. However, my intention was not to conduct detailed analyses of certain activist groups, forms of mobilising or cultural work, on which other researchers were already doing work (Schierup et al., 2014; Liinason and Questa, 2016; Sernhede et al., 2019). Several activists and artists were also publishing books that described their activities and political views or included poetry and fiction (e.g. Backström et al.,

2015; Norrby, 2015; Brown, 2017; Hubara, 2017; Perera, 2017; Alaeb et al., 2018; Vera-Zavala, 2020). My aim was to study the range of postethnic activism and its role in raising questions of race and racism in the Nordic countries, in which colour-blindness and 'white innocence' have been the hegemonic ideologies of recent decades. For these purposes, the broad perspective on activism has been essential. While I do not claim to have covered all kinds of postethnic activism, in my view, its main forms during the studied period have been included.

While the fieldwork periods in Copenhagen, Malmö and Stockholm consisted of six month periods of intensive research and follow-ups through social media and contacts with a few activists afterwards, the research in Helsinki and Turku took a longer time and was in the middle of my other work. The first interviews in Finland were conducted in 2015 and the last ones in 2019, while the main part of the material was gathered in 2016–2018. This fieldwork was more sporadic and mixed with ongoing interaction that has not been strictly about research, but involved other contact with activists – some of whom participated in the interviews, others did not – related to the organising of antiracist and decolonial events, production of media material and preparation of publications. While this cooperation with the Finnish activists and artists is not part of the research material, it has shaped my understanding of postethnic activism and the coalitional politics it engages (or does not engage) in. In the studied period, the Finnish postethnic activism developed from involving a few individual activists and bloggers to a multiplicity of groups, media sites and cultural projects, which has enabled a long-term following of the activism.

Translocal analyses provide insights into local organising, but also into internet-based mobilisation that is not bound to one locality. Groups on Facebook, Instagram and other web-based platforms enable a get-together of people racialised as non-white or 'others' in their localities and national contexts in the Nordic region, and create a translocal sphere for the communication and sharing of ideas. The translocal aspect of social media communication also allowed me to keep contact with some activists, follow-up on events and activities organised by the groups and find newly established networks.

Despite the study's focus on localities and their connections, the national contexts are relevant in certain respects. In the previous chapters, I have outlined the characteristics of the national contexts. I also examine national aspects in some of the analytical chapters. The translocal approach has guided my analysis to examine shared themes and patterns across national boundaries rather than to study national differences that are often the focus of comparative analyses. My analysis has centred on different forms of postethnic activism, their socio-economic contexts, politics and future visions, for which national boundaries bear only limited relevance. The benefit of including material from three countries is that these themes can be discussed in a more nuanced way and with an overview not bound to the specificities of one national context. However, it may also result in some (over)generalisations that a nationally focused study would avoid.

The empirical material used in this research includes a variety of sources, but places special emphasis on a large body of *interview material*. I conducted 81

interviews with activists and representatives of NGOs, of which 23 took place in Denmark, 33 in Sweden and 25 in Finland. The main part of this material consists of individual interviews, but I also conducted pair interviews and group interviews. The total number of interviewees is 89. I knew some of the activists and groups before embarking on the research. Other activists were located through their social media posting and organised activities, or at other events. The interviews were conducted in cafés, parks, homes and workplaces of the interviewees, my office at the university, and other places that the interviewees felt comfortable with. They lasted between 45 minutes and 3.5 hours, with the average being 1.5–2 hours. The interviews were recorded and transcribed.

In terms of age, the interviewees reflect the age groups participating in postethnic activism. A majority of the interviewees were in their 20s and 30s, while some were teenagers and a few in their 40s or older. Most of the interviewees were born and/or raised in the Nordic countries, but some were migrants from African, Latin American or Asian countries. Many were well educated, with either ongoing or finished academic studies, but several also had shorter educational histories or had dropped out of studies. Most of the interviewees belonged to groups racialised as non-white or 'others.' I also interviewed five activists who belonged to the white majority population or were (white) migrants from European countries, since they took part in postethnic activism that was led by racialised minority persons but open to others as well (see Chapter 5).

Moreover, I conducted *fieldwork* in public events and meetings organised by the activists and artists, as well as *recorded* or *videoed* some (parts) of the public events. The recordings and videos were from panel discussions, seminars and spoken word performances open for everybody, usually with audiences of several dozens or hundreds, some of them also streamed on social media. These recordings allowed me to go back to the actual discussions or performances, instead of just relying on memory. Predominantly the fieldwork was documented through notes.

The third kind of material used in this study consists of *textual and visual material* from newspapers and magazines in which the activists write, as well as websites of the groups and social media texts (Facebook and Instagram pages, blogs by the activists). All these texts were publicly available and open to the wider public. These have been referenced in the book, when cited. I have connected with several of the activists on social media even after the interviews, but these contacts have not been used as research material.

The politics of connection and shifting positionalities

Reflexivity has been a central part of the methodological discussions in feminist, postcolonial, decolonial and critical race perspectives, as well as more generally in qualitative methodology (e.g. Lather, 2001; Emirbayer and Desmond, 2012; Silverman, 2016). Evaluating the knowledge that we produce requires an understanding of all knowledge as socially situated (Haraway, 1988) and an examination of the particular locations within power structures from which that knowledge is

created (Collins, 2000; Moraga and Anzaldúa, 2015). Both researchers and research participants are located in various ways in the racial, ethnic, classed, gendered and global hierarchies that characterise our societies, affecting also the research process and its outcomes.

In this research, I have sought to follow Yasmin Gunaratnam's (2003, pp. 102–104) thoughts on moving from perceptions of commonality and difference to the work of connectivity. The 'politics of connection' she outlines involves methodological choices and practices that recognise and seek to identify aspects of disconnection but also to make the distances between researchers and research participants work in the quest of getting closer to each other. Gunaratnam argues for the importance of accounting for one's positionalities in the process of knowledge production, as well as for the active work of connectivity to examine aspects of commonality in the landscape of difference and dislocation. Rather than aim for ethnic, racial or gender matchmaking, with its assumption of innate commonalities, research should reflect on the politics of connection and the effects of the interplay of positionalities on the research results.

Examining knowledge and power, decolonial scholar Ramon Grosfoguel (2009) makes a useful distinction between the implications of social locations and epistemic locations on knowledge production. The locus of enunciation, the place from which the subject speaks, is located in specific geographical and embodied power relations, but also in different epistemologies – some developed within Eurocentric and hierarchical ways of thinking, others through critical theories and subaltern epistemic perspectives. The epistemic and theoretical positionings we adopt are, thus, not directly linked to or determined by our social locations, but rather vary between being in accordance with and in (more or less fruitful) discrepancy with them. In addition to examining the effects of social locations and epistemic locations, I argue for the usefulness of adding a third aspect to reflexive methodological analyses – that of political commitments. As will be shown below, political commitments can create points of connectivity and shared moments of struggle beyond ethnic, racial, class and gender divisions. Reflexivity in regards to the positionalities of the researcher and the research participants is, thus, about examining the interaction of these three elements (social locations, epistemic locations and political commitments) in the research process.

While my white body and structural location in racial hierarchies have been part of the research process since the beginning, affecting the data collection in many ways, the points of connectivity and disconnectivity did not always follow predetermined categorisations of race, ethnicity, class or gender. Doing fieldwork in three national contexts also made visible my shifting positionalities and the histories of lived experiences that played out during the research process in varying ways.

This study grew out of an earlier piece of research I conducted in Denmark in the early 2010s,[1] during which I interviewed migrant women's organisations and feminist of colour activists on their views about racism and civil society organising in a harsh political climate. Afterwards I kept contact with some Danish activists, and their work on questions of racism and political participation was an important inspiration for this research. When starting the fieldwork in Copenhagen, I thus

had previous research history and some existing contacts with activists and researchers, which helped to locate new actors and show my trustworthiness as a researcher. Negotiating credibility, understood as an affirmation that the researcher is worth spending time with, and approachability, referring to the perception that the researcher is non-threatening and can be trusted (Majorga-Gallo and Hordge-Freeman, 2017), was to some extent mediated through the local contacts I made. For example, in one of the interviews the activists told me they had asked around to inquire about me after they received my initial contact message. They also mentioned that they did not find it useful to respond to all requests to be interviewed, but carefully selected who they thought would be worth talking to and trustworthy. My long history of working with postcolonial feminist and critical race perspectives provided credibility, but would not always have been enough to guarantee the approachability and trust needed, had the acceptance of the local actors not been there. On the other hand, some groups and organisations I approached were very welcoming even without previous contact or background knowledge. When I participated in an open event organised by a Muslim youth organisation and inquired whether I could at some point interview a representative of the group, I met several young activists who volunteered to talk to me right away.

My positioning during the Danish fieldwork can be characterised as (at best) a *knowledgeable foreigner*. I had read a lot about Danish politics and society and spent several months in Copenhagen in connection with the earlier study, but my knowledge of activism and the everyday life of especially racialised minorities in Denmark was rather narrow. Recognising this lack of knowledge, understandable because of my foreignness, the interviewees were open to explaining the context of activism in Copenhagen and overall in Denmark, not assuming I knew all of this beforehand. In some instances, the foreignness even seemed to create a shared ground for discussing (un)belongingness and structural inequalities, despite my location in racial hierarchies. As an outsider, I was not expected to defend the practices of the white Danish society and it was also easy for me to opt out of them. Some interviewees were also migrants themselves, and were thus familiar with a situation of entering a new country without in-depth knowledge. I conducted most of the interviews in English, but also a few in Danish, depending on the preferences of the interviewees. While I read and understand Danish rather well, grasping all the nuances of the discussion was clearly easier with the interviews conducted in English.

In Sweden, my researcher positionality was in many ways different, building on *solidarity and strong alliance* with the activists. Being fluent in the Swedish language, having lived there as a migrant in my youth, and following the public discussions on a continuous basis, provided a better chance for participation and momentary feelings of 'insiderness.' The fieldwork evoked my own migration and activist histories more strongly than I had anticipated, but it also helped to make explicit the points of connection and disconnection between my white labour migrant experiences[2] and the experiences of the Black, Brown and other postcolonial migrants. Having been an activist in the peace and solidarity movement and participated in antiracist activism in my youth, I was familiar with the ways of working and organising in activism. I

also shared many political commitments and epistemological perspectives with the interviewees in Sweden. There was a strong resonance between my own and the interviewees' commitments to racialised class struggle and/or intersectional feminism, which led to many engaged and insightful discussions. With some interviewees, we discussed the connectivities of having lived in the 'Million programme'[3] residential areas and exclusionary processes in working life. One interviewee reminisced how she grew up in a neighbourhood with many Sweden Finnish families, but at some point realised they had moved away from the areas that today are the homes of predominantly non-white groups.

One example of the ways in which my migration and activist histories played out during the fieldwork is related to a performance I attended in Malmö. The event was organised by Interfem, an intersectional feminist group in Malmö. It featured an interactive monologue by a young woman who discussed her experiences of living in one of the marginalised 'Million programme' areas and later going to a white middle class school, where her Brown body was 'out of place.' When the performance started, the actor asked the audience to take seats in different parts of the auditorium: on one side those who identified as white Swedes, on the other side those who identified as racialised others. The aim of the act was to make the audience aware of and reflect on their social locations. In this situation, it was clear to me that I would not sit among the white Swedes. Experiences of exclusion and the hierarchies of Swedish society were part of my personal history, which made me disidentify with white Swedishness. At the same time, I was aware that my place was not really among the young Black and Brown people in the audience, due to the differences in experiences of racism and our social locations. So I ended up sitting on the side of the racialised 'others', but very close to the dividing line. This experience made me reflect on the deeply embodied nature of exclusionary processes, which could evoke memories and emotions a long time after. It also made me ponder on the strict division between white majority populations and those racialised as non-white, which reflects the social realities of the Nordic societies but also provides very limited space for groups in-between. Choosing the side of the racialised 'others' was for me about a commitment to shared struggle, but the choice also made me wonder if I was 'faking' myself in this position.

Having said this, there were also instances in the Swedish interviews during which our different locations within the racial hierarchies were made visible and the shared political commitments or epistemic perspectives only created minor connectivities. As in Denmark, my cooperation with a few well-known post-colonial feminist and critical race scholars paved the way to some of the interviews, leading the interviewees to make remarks on how they respected the work of these colleagues. The longer the research process proceeded the more people started recognising me when I contacted them about the research. Thus, temporality played a role for credibility (Baher and Toivanen, 2018): trust was gained through previous encounters and the spreading of the word.

In Finland, my researcher positionalities have varied *from cooperation to experiences of the dividing lines*. Mixed with my everyday life and combined with other work tasks, the research has taken a longer time but also been less intensive. I have more

often felt being placed among the white majority population by the research participants and also perceived myself in this positionality. Reflecting on the process of doing fieldwork in different contexts, I think that the harmonious solidarity positionality with the Swedish activists was inspiring, but it may also have downplayed the complexities of cross-racial relations and research practices. The messy work of research on and participation in antiracist struggles involves negotiating power hierarchies and building solidarities across divisions, making it also disharmonious and discontinuous. Nevertheless, getting in contact with the activists in Finland was relatively easy and the atmosphere in the interviews was usually open and engaged. I made an effort to contact both rather well-known front figures of the activist scene and those working at the grass roots level who were less visible in the media or only locally active.

In parallel with the interviews and other material collection, I have been organising events and workshops related to antiracism and decolonial perspectives, often involving both researchers and activists as speakers. Five of the Finnish interviews were conducted in connection with a video project in which I worked with the documentarist Carmen Baltzar to collect activist views on participating in antiracist feminism.[4] The research also led to an edited book that combines researcher and activist perspectives on racism, antiracism and decoloniality (Keskinen et al., 2021).

The shifting researcher positionalities during my movement across localities and national borders show that racialised perceptions are related to space and time. The different localities and national contexts provided several perspectives on the relationship between researcher and research participants, as well as on postethnic activism.

Working with and against racial categorisations

Researching racism and the politicisation of race requires also thinking about how to best go about it in order to not take racial conceptualisations for granted and reproduce the hierarchical categorisations that antiracist research wishes to dismantle. I have found useful Yasmin Gunaratnam's (2003) thoughts on working with and against racial and ethnic categorisations. She argues that such a 'doubled research practice' (Lather, 2001) means challenging essentialist categorisations and connecting lived experiences of racial hierarchies to theoretical insights of transformation. Gunaratnam (2003, p. 35) argues for "an approach to 'race' and ethnicity that works against the essentialism of racialised difference in the 'here' and the 'there,' and the 'now' and the 'then,' whilst working for an empowerment and enfranchisement of contingent, heterogeneous 'identities' in the future." I understand this as a suggestion to acknowledge the role of ethnic and racial categorisations in collective action, but at the same time to view such categorisations as contingent and changing, including the possibility of radically different categorisations that move beyond racial thinking.

For the analysis, this means being sensitive towards differences in categorisations, both their internal coherence and incoherence and their connecting points. For example, in Chapter 4 my analysis has not departed from an understanding of a

shared (postethnic) identity. Instead, it has sought to identify the varieties of understanding the common among the activists and the constitution of the field of postethnic activism through such processes. I have also conceptualised activism as 'communities of belonging,' instead of focusing on identities, to make visible activism as a space of belonging and the related understanding of multiple belongings. I generally use the terms 'racialised as non-white or other'[5] or 'racialised minorities' instead of writing about non-white or People of Colour. This choice is related to my wish to point out racialising processes and to examine the categorisations that the activists themselves use.

I think of my analysis as a reading of the complex field of postethnic activism, shaped by my theoretical and epistemological perspectives (see Chapters 1 and 2) and produced in the micropolitics of research (Bhavnani, 1993) described in this chapter. I have tried to keep in mind the messiness of antiracist work and the heterogeneity of the activist field, but also to be aware of the risk of idealising and creating representations of perfect and neat communities, which can end up dehumanising racialised minorities through "cleaning them of all sin" (Emirbayer and Desmond, 2012, p. 589).

Methodologies of responsibility

As described earlier, reflecting on research ethics has been a central part of the research process and its aftermath. Methodologies of responsibility (Lather, 2001) have guided me to search for ways to engage with the research participants that would respect their boundary setting and favoured points of connectivity. I did not seek access to events or social media sites that were designed for those racialised as non-white. Instead, I focused on interviews to allow the activists to choose what they wanted to disclose for research purposes. A large amount of the text material is openly available online and many events are organised for mixed audiences, which was sufficient to gather an understanding of the activities and topics addressed.

Ethical questions and methodological responsibility have also been an important part of the process of thinking about how to represent activism through writing and how to name the research participants. Qualitative research ethics usually stresses the need to use pseudonyms and secure the anonymity of the research participants (e.g. Silverman, 2016). Nevertheless, recent discussions within decolonial methodologies have pointed out that naming activists or other central actors in the studied marginalised communities is a way of giving credit to their knowledge and to avoid extractivist knowledge production (Hlabangane, 2019). My decision in regards to naming the activists has sought to balance between these principles. Some of the activists who participated in the research strongly emphasised their need to stay anonymous, while others said they would not mind being cited with their name. Although open to being cited by name, I am not sure the activists would agree with all of my interpretations of their citations. To adopt a systematic procedure and ensure respectful citation practices, I have chosen to provide pseudonyms to all citations from the interviews. Furthermore, I have included names of

the groups and platforms, so that their work can be found by interested readers, and cited media sources in which the activists are named. Thus, my aim has been to take into account both the need to safeguard anonymity and to make visible the work the activists do.

Conclusions

This chapter has described the different materials and methods used in the analysis. It has explained how the material was collected and what kind of methodological choices were conducted during the research process. The chapter has further examined the implications of a translocal approach in the study of postethnic activism and its relation to a nationally oriented comparative analysis. Furthermore, the chapter has discussed the politics of connectivity, based on Gunaratnam's (2003) methodological discussion of conducting research on race and ethnicity. I have examined the implications of my researcher positionalities on the collection of material and analysis, identifying three researcher positionalities that developed in the studied national contexts. In Denmark, I was (at best) a 'knowledgeable foreigner.' In Sweden, my researcher positionality was characterised by 'solidarity and a strong alliance' with the activists. In Finland, closer to my everyday life and work environment, my researcher positionalities have shifted between 'cooperation and experiences of the dividing lines.' In addition to examining the effects of social locations and epistemic locations, I have argued for the usefulness of adding a third aspect to reflexive methodological analyses – that of political commitments.

The chapter concluded with a discussion of the challenges of disrupting racial categorisations while studying (anti)racism. I have approached antiracist work and research on it through an understanding of its messiness (Gunaratnam, 2003) and emphasised the heterogeneity of the activist field. At the same time, I have tried to avoid idealising and creating representations of perfect and neat communities, which would ignore existing frictions and disagreements. The chapter has also discussed the implications of research ethics on the study, building on methodologies of responsibility (Lather, 2001).

Notes

1 The research "Gender, Ethnicity and Discourses of Violence in Families" (2009–2012) examined media and political constructions of violence in racialised minority families in Denmark and Finland from a postcolonial feminist perspective.
2 A majority of the Finnish migrants arrived in the 1960s and 1970s to work in the Swedish factories and in other working class jobs. At the time of my stay in Stockholm in the 1980s, the large-scale migration was already declining but Finns continued to be employed in factories and care work, where ethnic divisions were tangible.
3 The Million programme residence areas consist of large housing estates that were built during the 1960s and 1970s in Sweden, with predominantly rental housing. The areas, designed to erase housing problems and provide modern facilities for the tenants, today constitute the 'suburbs' (*förorten*) where a majority of the inhabitants have roots in African, Latin American and Asian countries and class inequalities are distinct (see Chapter 7).

4 The video "5 questions about antiracist feminism" can be watched at www.youtube. com/watch?v=b5nGKajCsM0&t=27s (accessed 27 July 2021).
5 The formulation 'racialised as other' is needed to make explicit that for example Muslims from the Balkans are racialised as 'others' despite their European origin (Keskinen, 2014). These groups mainly arrived to the Nordic countries as refugees from the civil wars of Yugoslavia in the 1990s.

4

CREATING COMMUNITIES OF BELONGING AND NAMING THE 'COMMON'

Introduction

Despite the many differences in the forms, focus and activities of postethnic activism, it is built on an understanding of living in a racially ordered society and being part of oppressed communities, as well as the necessity of organising to create futures beyond such hierarchies. Postethnic activism is about mobilising as people who "must work towards changing our fates within the *fire now*" (Kamunge et al., 2018, p. 1; emphasis in original). It is also about recognising that one belongs to groups that "cannot make a separate peace" (Lipsitz, 2017, p. 118) with the racial, classed and gendered power relations of the Nordic societies, as their marginalised positions are the foundation on which such hierarchical structures rely. In this chapter, I begin with a discussion of the logic and driving force of postethnic activism. I then examine the different ways of creating communities of belonging through postethnic activism and how the 'common' is understood in these forms of activism.

The activist groups identify the reasons for their organising in the impact of racism on societal structures and individual lives. They connect the violence of global raciality, the outcome of centuries-long histories of colonialism and racism (Fanon, 1961/2004), with individual experiences of unsafety and marginalisation by those racialised as 'others.' The activists argue for the need to analyse oppressive social structures and practices, in order to understand the broader context of individual experiences. Nevertheless, many activists find it even more pertinent to focus on the multiplicity of views, ideas and experiences present in the communities targeted by racism. They wish to centre the perspectives marginalised in hegemonic orders – the lives, experiences, everyday struggles and organising of racialised minorities – as a way to move forward politically. In a news story about Swedish activism, educator and urban activist Lewend Tasin argues for the relevance of shifting the focus from white spaces and their logic towards developing new social and cultural spaces that enable discussions among those racialised as 'others':

> We are oppressed by a racist power order and live in a time when it is common to categorise and divide people into groups. To create a more inclusionary society we need to acknowledge that we live in postcolonial times. We need to build our own structures within culture, journalism, legal thinking and practice. Only then can we develop methods and strategies that allow us to overcome hindrances. By doing so, we can strengthen ourselves, each other, and our neighbourhoods. In order to do this, we need to talk about ourselves, not about other people. We need to stop seeing ourselves as the antipode of whiteness.
>
> *(Al-Khamisi, 2016)*

Tasin's words capture many of the essential aspects of postethnic organising. While a critical analysis of the existing racial, class and gender hierarchies of the Nordic countries is the starting point of the understanding of what the groups and their participants have in 'common,' it is the 'talking to each other' and developing perspectives beyond the existing hegemonic orders that motivates most forms of postethnic activism.

Furthermore, the multiple forms of postethnic activism are characterised by an understanding of the embodied nature of racial, class and gender hierarchies. This 'theory from the flesh' perspective is most pronounced in antiracist feminism and queer of colour activism, but it is also distinct in activism formed around Black experience and African diaspora. Even other kinds of postethnic activism refer to the embodied nature and lived effects of hierarchies that define certain bodies as different and 'out of place' (Ahmed, 2000; Lundström, 2007). The theory of the flesh articulates understandings of how the "physical realities of our lives – our skin colour, the land or concrete we grew up on, our sexual longings – all fuse to create a politic born out of necessity" (Moraga and Anzaldúa, 2015, p. 19). The body as both inscripted in power hierarchies and as a site for knowledge and agency is at the centre of such approaches. The Latin American concept *poner el cuerpo* is used in research perspectives to examine everyday confrontations with power and 'putting the body on the line' even at the risk of being exposed to violence and harassment (Cuesta and Mulinari, 2018). The following words by Audry, an Afro-Swedish organiser, articulate the experienced necessity of activism and the Black body as a politicised location:

> It's like a feeling that as a person one is bound to one's body. I mean this physical body. And because of that, I am a political question myself… just to exist as a Black woman. For example, today when I was on my way to meet you I wanted to fix my hair and then I thought: But how should I wear my afro hair, my natural hair. Just to wear it is already a political statement or a fashion statement. My natural being is questioned in so many ways. And I think that's what's driving me or creating this will to and wish for a community, to get together.
>
> *(Audry, Sweden)*

As Audry's words show, creating communities of belonging is an important part of postethnic activism. I use the concept 'communities of belonging' instead of

engaging with discussions on identity or identity politics, since I find belonging a more useful theoretical approach. Theories on belonging are well established in studies of migration and diaspora, which emphasise the perspective of multiple belongings and the creation of home in several localities (e.g. Ahmed et al., 2003; Christiansen and Hedetoft, 2004; Alinia et al., 2014). Contrary to many theories on identity, belongingness starts from the idea of multiplicity and an active process of creating communities, as well as reflecting on the meanings of both groups and places. Moreover, in the current political context identity politics has become a floating signifier (Hall, 1997) that signifies widely different matters, and is often used to discredit antiracist, feminist and queer actors in right-wing and liberal public arguments (see Chapter 6). The term is seldom used in a way that would address the kind of radical change its original developers in the Combahee River Collective and other feminist of colour groups aimed for (Haider, 2018). Through a discussion of communities of belonging, I hope to overcome some of the fixed positions in recent debates and articulate a dynamic understanding of activism and community building.

Communities of belonging created through postethnic activism include both the sense of belonging – feeling at home and being attached to a group of people and place – and belonging to a collectivity that is politically and socially delineated (cf. Yuval-Davis, 2006). Furthermore, these communities of belonging include both locally formed communities, in which personal relationships play a role, and communities that are imagined (Anderson, 1983) in the sense that not all activists know each other but still experience belonging to the same community. Building communities of belonging through postethnic activism is important in a racist society, since it allows the participants to feel at home and be part of a collective with shared views of oppressive processes, as well as coming together to work for change. It is about necessity, but also hope and engagement with others that makes life meaningful.

Postethnic activism is largely a movement of young people and young adults, who lived their whole life, or from a very young age, in the Nordic countries, yet are not allowed to feel at home there. As such, it bears some similarity to the Black and Asian organising in the UK in the 1970s and 1980s (e.g. Gilroy, 1987; Ramamurthy, 2013) and the *mouvement beur* in France in the 1980s (Bassel and Lloyd, 2011; Harrison, 2018), both of which grew out of the experiences and interpretations of the children of migrants or the first generation citizens. On the other hand, the postethnic activism studied in this research is better understood in the context of current antiracist movements across Europe and the US, such as the transnational Black Lives Matter movement (Taylor, 2016), the French Mouvement des Indigènes de la Républic (Bouteldja, 2017) and the broad scope of digital feminisms of colour (Tuzcu, 2016). Some of the participants in postethnic activism are migrants themselves and although many of them are citizens of the Nordic countries, others struggle to renew their residence permits or deal with other effects of border politics. Therefore, the generational aspect should not be overemphasised.

In the following, I analyse in detail the five main forms of postethnic activism, with their distinct perceptions of what the 'common' constitutes. I build on

thoughts of multitude as a social subject that is internally differentiated and multiple, constituted through actions that create the 'common' (see Chapter 2). The analysis in this chapter detects the ways postethnic activists search for the common and where they locate it. At the end of the chapter, I discuss some less prevalent ways of building communities of belonging in postethnic activism and the dilemmas of coalition building.

Antiracist feminism and queer of colour activism

The most widely spread form of postethnic activism is antiracist feminism and queer of colour activism. It is prevalent in all the three countries and across the studied localities. In Finland, the main part of postethnic activism identifies with intersectional feminism, partly overlapping with other kinds of postethnic activism. Even in Denmark and Sweden antiracist feminist and queer of colour groups are very active, operating on social media, forming local groups, and organising as NGO-funded projects.

A core theme in antiracist feminist mobilising is that the activities need to address racism, not only focus on questions of gender, sexuality or class. This kind of feminism is built on the view that questions of gender and sexuality are profoundly tied up with racism and antiracism, as well as the other way round. The participants emphasise that to find a will to mobilise oneself in activism requires finding a group that treats feminist, queer and antiracist matters as the entangled processes and structures they are experienced to be.

> I mean they are so much connected. I think that (…) antiracist or postcolonial feminism is like seeing the whole picture. That it's not about separate matters but about power and liberation on several levels, related to the multiple forms of discrimination and oppression. So for me it was very important that there was a focus on all these questions.
>
> *(Rita, Sweden)*

Although intersectionality and multiple power relations have been widely acknowledged as central questions for feminist theory and feminist politics, the everyday level of feminist politics has not necessarily included a thorough discussion of what this means for the practices and ways of organising. Many of the interviewed activists refer to white spaces in feminist and queer activism where normativities and practices are exclusionary towards those racialised as 'others.' Within white spaces those racialised as 'others' are confined to racial isolation and constantly required to relate to hegemonic orders (Andreassen and Myong, 2017, p. 102), which narrows down the possibilities of agency and subjectivity.

> But if, for example, you are queer, and you experience heteronormativity, and you experience that your queer identity doesn't have room in the society, then it can be very frustrating to be in a room that's heteronormative (…) But when you are also queer and in a white queer room that's also difficult,

> because you're the only one… or might be the only one… that experiences
> racialisation. So a lot of the times you are forced to choose either or. Do I
> want to be uncomfortable being the only non-white or do I want to be
> uncomfortable being the only queer person? I think that's very true and I
> think it's very difficult for people to understand, especially people who are in
> this queer and feminist scene, to understand that a feminist and queer envir-
> onment is not welcoming for everybody and it's not open for everybody. And
> even if it theoretically is so, in practice it's not.
>
> *(Irene, Denmark)*

Antiracist feminist activists develop a critique of white spaces in political
organisations and activist circles, where they witness a lack of focus on questions rele-
vant for them. They also address the 'white smugness' of feminist, antiracist and leftist
actors who think they 'know the discourse' of intersectionality, yet are unwilling to
scrutinise their own participation in the existing power structures (Kanai, 2019; Kes-
kinen, 2021). Developing their own feminist groups or queer of colour networks that
can focus on political questions of relevance (also) for racialised minorities and allow
for a sense of belonging is thus a logical outcome for many of the activists.

Intersectional feminism forms the central theoretical and practical resource for anti-
racist feminist and queer of colour activists. While intersectionality has been used in
varying ways in feminism (Lewis, 2013; Tomlinson, 2013), the activists refer to it as the
theoretical resource developed by postcolonial feminists and Black feminists (e.g. Collins,
2000; de los Reyes and Mulinari, 2005; Habel, 2012). Some activists are very inspired by
African-American intellectual traditions and feminist mobilising, whereas others
emphasise the anticolonial and postcolonial traditions of feminism. From this perspec-
tive, white feminism with its embeddedness in colonial ways of thinking is not the main
tradition of feminist thought and should not be located at the centre of feminist discus-
sions. Instead, the activists draw upon a variety of feminisms, ranging geographically
between the Nordic region, the US and countries in different parts of the Global South.

> For me the kind of feminism that I want to use as my method is an anticolonial
> and antiracist work at the same time. It has been for a very long time, it's just
> not… I mean it's the view of feminism as a white straight middle class project that
> I think is a misrepresentation of feminism. So there is no true feminism that
> would be the white feminism, it's not like that.
>
> *(Roya, Denmark)*

Intersectional feminism allows the activists to recognise their own struggles in the
racial, gender, sexual and class hierarchies of society, as well as to connect to other
struggles experienced as closely related although not exactly their own. In Andrea's
view, her embodied experiences of being cast outside of normative whiteness creates
connections with trans persons rather than with many white (cis) feminists. She iden-
tifies the oppression of bodily normativities and (their) violence that targets both
racialised non-white and trans people, although in different ways.

> In the queer environment, you have everything, you have transgender people, you have intersex people, you have lesbians, gays and everything… and for many of these people it's also visual, especially if you are a trans person it's very visual. So this sort of discrimination that I can feel on [the basis of] being racialised, I see it also, I connect a lot more with for example trans people.
>
> *(Andrea, Denmark)*

Antiracist feminist and queer spaces are themselves a result of – and an ongoing process or experiment of – coalitional politics. Different groups and persons are racialised in different ways in regards to racial, religious or geopolitical categorisations. In addition, class hierarchies, educational capital and cis-normativities produce different experiences and differing access to power. Many of the studied antiracist feminist groups argued that the decision of who is racialised as 'other' and who is not should be made by the participants themselves. The activists were engaged in discussions over how power relations related to colourism (Burton et al., 2010), and the different positionings of Black and Brown bodies affected the dynamics and interactions in the groups. That antiracist feminism creates a community of belonging with shared experiences on one level – the understanding of what it means to be racialised as 'other' and at the same time be subjected to gender and sexual hierarchies – does not mean the omission of other differences, such as those related to class, citizenship or linguistic skills. One of the topics that antiracist feminists discuss is the language used and how to express oneself so that the way of speaking does not become too academic and exclusionary for working class people.

> One could think that just because we are a separatist organisation [for women and trans persons who are racialised as 'others'] that it's like flat. But we have so many, really many power relations among ourselves that we discuss and think about when we talk and whose interpretation is prioritised and who has the right to say this and so forth when we talk about the group. And we talk about giving space to each other and time to learn also, since we all have different starting points but we can learn from each other.
>
> *(Hibo, Sweden)*

To summarise, the grounds for creating communities of belonging in antiracist feminist and queer of colour groups consist of a combination of embodied experiences and political analyses of the societal context in which the experiences are situated. The common is built around shared understandings of how racialised, gendered and sexualised processes shape embodied lives, culture, working life, politics and social relations, and a will to work together for change.

Activism in marginalised urban neighbourhoods

A broad spectrum of political and cultural activism takes place in racialised and stigmatised urban areas. In Sweden and Finland, such residential areas are discussed as 'suburbs,' whereas in Denmark the term used about these areas in public is

'ghettos' (see Chapter 7). The imaginaries related to and the socio-economic characteristics of these urban areas are comparable to the French *banlieus* (Dikec, 2007) rather than the Anglo-American understanding of suburbs. These neighbourhoods are targeted by territorial stigmatisation (Wacquant, 2008; Thapar-Björkert et al., 2019), which includes stigmatising and often crime-focused media coverage together with structural marginalisation in terms of race and class.

The first kind of community building in urban postethnic activism is connected to the neighbourhood as a specific place with its social relations and everyday materialities. Communities of belonging are built on living in the neighbourhood, with shared experiences of the multiethnic and multiracial everyday conviviality (Gilroy, 2004), as well as of the class inequalities and segregation that shape the living conditions of the inhabitants. Some of the interviewees emphasise that the way cities are shaped has affected the development of urban activism. For example, Stockholm is divided into clearly delineated suburbs that are located far away from the city centre, while Malmö is divided into city spaces that are more loosely connected to each other and the distances between marginalised areas and wealthy areas are less distinctive. Therefore, organising in Malmö has been less focused on individual neighbourhoods than in Stockholm, where activist groups have had a strong presence in certain suburbs.

While firmly anchored in the localities and their social networks, the activists are explicit about the similarities between stigmatised and marginalised neighbourhoods in other parts of the country. The communities of belonging are formed around experiences of racialisation and class hierarchies, but also on diasporic family lives and growing up in convivial neighbourhoods, where even the language has specific characteristics. Urban segregation makes structural inequalities visible and localised. At the same time, it enables the creation of communities of belonging within and across these localities.

> In the segregated residential areas of Sweden it is so obvious that we have a shared language, we have a language that the majority [of] society doesn't understand. We have experiences that the majority [of] society shuts their eyes from and we have histories that we carry with us, and we can recognise each other in them. For my activism, it has been important to value these.
>
> *(Nadine, Sweden)*

In a sense, postethnic urban activism is open for anybody living in the marginalised and stigmatised neighbourhoods to participate. Due to the urban segregation patterns, most of the participants involved in such activism belong to racialised minorities, but even majority people and migrants racialised as white to a minor extent participate in the activities. Emma, a white Danish interviewee, described her motivation to engage in the local activities by pointing out the discrepancies between stigmatising media images and her personal experiences of living in the area. Her experiences were more nuanced and multifaceted than the media images, while not denying that certain patterns of criminality were taking place in the neighbourhood.

[it was] the way of talking about, and there were pictures with young men in hoodies and the gangs were called immigrant gangs. And I was like but what about the other gangs which is Hells Angels that's Danish born [laughs] young men but they don't say white young men. So it's kind of... every time there was something with crime they were talking about the young dark immigrant men. And I got so frustrated about this actually because I lived in the area and it was also like: oh how do you dare living there and I was just like: I love living here. But I could also see that there were a lot of things going on.

(Emma, Denmark)

Racial belonging was not always the defining trait, if the white activists had a firm grounding and lived in the marginalised neighbourhoods. Their credibility in the eyes of the activists racialised as non-white was also tied to a political commitment and sharing of the goals of the group, since the aim was to create social change.

In urban postethnic activism, communities of belonging are built on living and doing activism in neighbourhoods where the implications of racial and class hierarchies are tangible. At the same time, some activists argue that being 'from the suburbs' is a question of style and a sense of belonging that is not always tied to actual living environments. In the following citation, Nadine describes the multiplicity of the group that are 'from the suburb' and the fluidity of this community of belonging. In such understandings, belonging is tied to the experience of being racialised as non-white and participating in the culture created by those of the same community.

Well just because you are from the suburb doesn't mean that you always have the same problems. (…) And I think the concept 'suburb' is very fluid, it's not fixed. I mean, some people can carry a kind of suburban identity and not at all come from the suburbs. It may be that you have been the only 'blatte'[1] [non-white] in an area of detached houses or something similar, but you have had friends or listened to hip hop, you have done certain things, you understand totally... like there is no way of denying that you have a suburban identity.

(Nadine, Sweden)

Nadine's formulation highlights the second kind of community building in urban postethnic activism – the imaginary and more abstract level of belonging based on culture and politics that moves beyond territory and place. In such understandings, community building is tied to the racialised position as non-white and to postcolonial analyses of global raciality. This community building is a result of discussions developed in some parts of urban activism in Sweden, in which the focus on practical localised issues has gradually given way to questions such as why do non-white people live in the stigmatised neighbourhoods and why are they socio-economically disadvantaged (Sernhede et al., 2019, pp. 216–222)? Reading into postcolonial theory and other theoretical literature has allowed the activists to frame the community of belonging on the basis of a political analysis that situates the 'suburbs' in the broader societal and global power structures. One of the groups – Rådet av Enade Kreoler – describes the process and their thoughts about the 'common' in the following way:

So we started thinking about what we recognised in each other. It felt strange to call us concrete, because we are not any construction material. And we cannot call us 'blatte' because the word 'blatte' in French means cockroach. *We are no fucking cockroaches.* It was somewhere there that we saw a pattern. All words that existed for people like us were developed by people who are not like us – *blackskull, immigrant, Turk, blatte.* We continued to have discussions about who we really are and what we have in common. We talk in ways that distinguish us from the traditional Swedish language use and we borrow many words from languages that are spoken by the residents in our neighbourhoods and we also define meanings of words. We all shared a feeling that we did not really feel at home in Sweden but neither did we do so in our so-called home countries. At the same time, we felt a great togetherness that was not connected to a national frame. We could recognise ourselves in persons from totally different countries. People like us live in many countries in Europe. They have their roots in other countries than the ones in which they grew up. And they have also been called derogatory words. When we continued talking about these questions with the help of postcolonial analysis we came to the conclusion that we are not only Swedes, but not either from the so-called home countries. We are a mix of different cultures and identities. We do not have to choose between being one or the other; instead, we can accept all the parts of ourselves. And it was somewhere there that we found the concept 'creol.'

(Rådet av Enade Kreoler, 2016, pp. 63–65)

Groups formed around the Black experience and African heritage

Postethnic activism framed around being Black or part of the African diaspora is a vibrant form of mobilising in the studied countries. This organising has the longest tradition in Sweden, where the organisation Afrosvenskarnas riksorganisation (The Afro-Swedish National Organisation) has been influential since the 1990s, and other organisations are active locally, such as Afrosvenskarnas forum för rättvisa (Afro-Swedish Forum for Social Justice) in Malmö. In addition to the established organisations, Black activism is organised in groups on social media, cultural associations and annual events, media sites, and networks addressing a range of topics reflecting the interests of the African diaspora.

In the Nordic context, being Black is usually a reference to people from the African diaspora. It is not very common to use Black as a politicised collective identity that would cover people from the African, Asian and Caribbean diasporas targeted by racism, as was the case in the UK especially in the 1970s and 1980s (Gilroy, 1987; Narayan, 2019a). Scholars have pointed out the erosion of such a broad understanding of Black identity in the following decades and the issues resulting from a bypassing of differences (Alexander, 2018). The understanding of Black as somebody from the African diaspora, prominent in the Nordic region, also involves a very heterogeneous group ranging from newly arrived migrants to those of mixed race origin, and people migrating from or with heritage on several

continents. Nevertheless, Black functions as a common denominator through references to the past and present racial oppression. The activists in the Nordic region have also developed new terms, such as Afro-Swede and Afro-Finn, to make visible their location in two traditions – the African diaspora and their home country – and to claim belonging to the country where they live, despite constant denials of belongingness.

The motivation for participating in activism that mobilises the African diaspora is expressed in similar terms by many activists. Shirley, who chose to become active in one of the established organisations, explains that studies in global politics and political economy led her to connect historically formed inequalities with her own life experiences. Her story of realising that her personal struggles were part of a broader pattern that required changing was common among the activists.

> Then I started reading about the injustices of the global economy, how the economy was organised in different countries, what were the terms and conditions and so forth. And it was like: no, I need to take the fight because this is a part of me, this is my heritage, I mean not only cultural heritage but also my personal heritage and this will be my children's heritage too. But at least I want to try to make a change and show that it doesn't have to be this way. I am also the norm.
>
> *(Shirley, Sweden)*

Many Black activists address the histories of colonialism and trade of enslaved persons, as well as their effects on the development of racial capitalism and global coloniality (Quijano, 2000; Robinson, 2000). Compared to other kinds of post-ethnic activism discussed in this book, Black activism is especially conscious of the historical trajectories of the present racial orders and the transnational movements mobilising the African diaspora. A central theoretical and political tradition drawn upon in this organising is Pan-Africanism. The Pan-African political movement, established in the late 19th century and one of the main political ideologies of the 20th century, has included several currents, some of which are also contradictory to each other (Adi, 2012; Abrahamsen, 2020). Nevertheless, the Pan-African ideology has from the beginning been anti-colonial and anti-imperialist, focusing on the unity of African nations and the African diaspora around the world. Some of the interviewed activists discuss Pan-Africanism as an ideology they build their work on. They refer to the work of African politicians and thinkers, such as Kwame Nkrumah and Jomo Kenyatta, but also to Black Panther leaders, such as Malcolm X. Lamin identifies Pan-Africanism as his main inspiration and connects it to the practical work required to change Swedish society.

> Many Pan-African leaders talk about a community beyond borders, beyond geographical borders and nationality (…) we live in a system that continues to humiliate and oppress, that continues to invisibilise Black men. Exactly the same way it has always done. Power and resources do not belong to Afro-

Swedes. Power and resources continue to belong to the same group that colonised Africa. A good example from Sweden is literature and the production of knowledge. It becomes very clear when you look at history books or children's literature, if you go to the children's library and have a look at the books, how Black people are represented in these books (…) What we do is try to present alternatives: here we have other kinds of literature.

(Lamin, Sweden)

Other activists draw more strongly from the African-American political struggles and cultural representations produced in the US. They refer to the history of the civil rights struggles, Black Lives Matter demonstrations and the broad influence of Black popular culture. Many activists see Black cultural production through music, literature, film and fashion as a source of pride. Black culture also creates transnational communities of belonging. The US inspiration is visible, among others, in the Swedish group Black Coffee, which gathers on social media and arranges local meetings over a cup of coffee.

To sit down and drink coffee is revolutionary. Partly it is about having political discussions. If you look at the civil rights movement in the US – how did it start? The civil society and individual people went to cafés and refused to accept segregation. They went and sat down at cafés, were attacked, you can see it on the photos. People pour coffee over them, ice cream, food and they just sit there with their coffee and smile. Just: we are not going to move anywhere. So there is a certain strength in it that we want to drive forward. I've always been conscious about it… I want to connect to this tradition, even if we don't live there, but we can think that we choose to be seen as African-Swedes.

(Bisrat, Sweden)

Nevertheless, the US influence is also experienced as somewhat controversial. For example, one of the Danish organisations that gathers persons from the African diaspora has involved central actors with a background in the US. In the interviews, some other activists commented on the differences between these activists and the larger African diaspora in Denmark, pondering on the privileged position of Black people from the US in comparison with Black Muslims from Somalia or other refugee communities.

The group Good Hair Day emphasises the need to strengthen the Afro-Finnish community, self-empowerment and creation of positive representations of the African diaspora. They also argue for the broadening of the scope of Finnishness beyond white normativity. Good Hair Day started as an event to discuss beauty ideals and share ideas of taking care of Afro hair in 2016. The activities have grown in subsequent years, but continue to focus on the politics of Afro hair, celebrating Black community building and expanding representations of Afro-Finnishness. The activities of the group are mainly aimed at Afro-Finns, but the group also educates

other organisations about the societal situation of the African diaspora in Finland and participates in public debates. Community building and self-respect are the central pillars of the activities:

> For some Afro-Finnish participants, the GHD event may be the first experience of not being alone; instead, it centres Afro-Finns and the Afro-Finnish community. (…) GHD is a space where we celebrate blackness, brownness, Afro hair, Afro-Finnishness, and the Afro-Finnish community. It is a space where you can just be yourself, sense a belongingness to the group, celebrate Afro-Finnishness or participate in discussions about Afro-Finnishness on a personal, societal and political level.
>
> *(Moua et al., 2021, p. 115)*

In Black activism, as in other forms of postethnic activism, the understanding of the 'common' and belonging is based on several characteristics. Being part of the African diaspora is the main point of connection, but many activists also mention political stance or political ideology. For example, some organisations accept members who do not belong to the African diaspora (see Chapter 5), since this enables them to gather supporters who accept the aims and principles of the organisation. Political stance and willingness to participate in solidarity is, thus, also of importance. On the other hand, being Black is not always the only or main defining trait in creating a sense of community. Some activists choose to participate in several kinds of activism, because they think it reflects their intersectional belonging and interests. Others mention experiences of internal power relations as reasons for shifting from one kind of postethnic activism to another. Discussing what kinds of commonalities are important, Adenike emphasises the meaning of political ideology (feminism) and her embodied experiences as an Afro-Finnish person. In order to feel connected to others in activism, both of these criteria should be reflected in the composition of the group:

> I also include feminism, because for me it's not enough… I know that homophobia exists in the African communities or Afro-communities in Finland and like, the roles of men and women, and that people don't really see other genders than men and women… there is quite a clear and hierarchical view about the roles of women and men. So there are also a lot of problems, and I'm not really interested in something like, "we are all Afro-Finns and I will turn a blind eye on you being homophobic." So feminism needs to be included all the time, I think connection is both about the experience and feminism.
>
> *(Adenike, Finland)*

Muslim groups addressing racism and Islamophobia

Anti-Muslim racism has been on the rise since the introduction of the War on Terror in the early 2000s, which resulted in state- and municipality-led securitisation

policies targeting Muslim populations. Such policies and media coverage circulate images of the 'terrorist at home' and the 'enemy within' (Kapoor and Kalra, 2013; Kundnani, 2014; Massoumi et al., 2017; Alghasi, 2019). The 'terrorist threat' has been proclaimed in Islamophobic media debates, attacks against mosques and everyday racism experienced by individual Muslims and persons perceived to be Muslims. These processes provide the background for a creation of communities of belonging that identify forms of exposure to anti-Muslim racism and address these publicly. Some existing Muslim organisations have sought to organise activities addressing racism and Islamophobia, while new associations and groups have also developed to target these issues.

The groups and individual activists in this study represent a variety of approaches within Islamic traditions and Muslim organisations, but they all share an interest in acting against anti-Muslim racism. They also build on a postethnic community of belonging, based on Muslim faith and ethics. The groups consist of members with different ethnic and racial belonging. Some activists also emphasise that they have consciously sought out such groups to organise in, instead of participating in ethnically based organisations. The groups also share an interest in addressing the living conditions of Muslims in the Nordic countries and claim belonging to these countries as Muslims.

> This organisation wasn't really enough for me, since it was so focused on one culture, one language, demarcated into one. So I left it (…) [for] a new organisation, in which we started working with many different kinds of young people, there were Kurds, Somalis, some Finnish converts (…) So a lot of different nationalities and the common denominator was that they were all Finnish and all Muslims. And it was about finding our own place in the society. These were the things that attracted me and which I got 'hooked to,' as they say.
>
> (Hodan, Finland)

The combination of being a Muslim and a citizen of one of the Nordic countries is for many interviewees a rather mundane aspect of life they don't think much about, in contrast to what the public debates and research focusing on the issues of 'living between two cultures' would imply. Instead, it is the Islamophobic public discourses and confrontations with everyday racism that make life difficult. As discussed in Chapter 1, the Danish public debates have been extremely harsh and the strict asylum and family reunification policies have especially targeted groups with a background in countries with a Muslim majority (Siim and Skjeie, 2008; Myong and Bissenbakker, 2016; Keskinen, 2017). Nevertheless, Denmark does not stand out in the descriptions by the activists. Counter terrorism legislation, increasing surveillance and policing practices, and the construction of Muslim populations as 'suspect communities' (Kalra and Mehmood, 2013) are characteristic of all three studied countries, as well as reflecting broader European trends. Many of the activists were critical towards the calls for a collective condemnation of

terrorism presented in the media and by state actors (Qureshi, 2020) and the division between 'good' and 'bad' Muslims (Garner and Selod, 2015; Massoumi, 2015), on which such rhetoric is built. Jamila, who is active in a Muslim youth organisation in Copenhagen, questions the practice of dividing Muslims into radical and moderate, the 'good' and the 'bad' Muslims. She emphasises that Muslims are a heterogeneous group that escapes any labels.

> It's because there's been a lot of aggravation against Muslims, especially this year and it's just like one episode after another. And they don't think about that, you know, it's not all Muslims. If it's a Muslim who does something wrong they are labeling all the Muslims. (…) And we just got tired and we said okay we have to say something, we have to speak to the Muslims about this. We don't accept that people call us fundamentalists, like you are radical Muslims, you are terrorists, you are Al-Qaida and you are this and that. We are just Muslims you know. (…) Because it's like, they want to divide us.
>
> *(Jamila, Denmark)*

Being targeted by counter terrorism policies and surveillance practices, has led the activists to create organisations that seek to safeguard the human rights of Muslims and to promote non-discrimination work. Some organisations arrange support services for those contacted by the security and intelligence authorities, for example for inquiries and offers to collaborate. State and municipal actions have created an atmosphere of suspicion in which cultural exclusions from the national 'us' are combined with the investigation, policing and incarceration of persons on the basis of their beliefs, affiliations and connections with 'otherness' (Pitcher, 2009, p. 136). Suspicion and labelling as 'extremists' have led to certain activists being banned from attendance in public events and targeted by harsh media campaigns. Furthermore, the organisations seek to provide support and make public discriminatory incidents taking place in working life, welfare institutions and schools, among others. Samira, who identifies as a leftist Muslim with an interest in promoting anti-imperialist analyses, connects the counter terrorism policies in Sweden to global power relations. She also highlights their implications for everyday life as a Muslim and the need for a collective analysis of the role of Muslims in Nordic and European societies:

> we give lectures in which we connect the local, national and international level in order to understand that the War on Terrorism is global. There is an imperialist world order that explains many of the wars in the Muslim world (…) but we also discuss questions that Muslims are interested in and about our role in this part of the world, what it can be. And questions of integrity, self-respect, I mean not to be cowardly but to fight.
>
> *(Samira, Sweden)*

The studied Muslim groups identify the common in terms of faith and ethics, but combine these with a political analysis of the situation of Muslims in the Nordic

societies. The interviewees have different explanations about the reasons for the current situation and their views on the ways to tackle it vary. However, they share a conviction that faith and ethics are a resource for the struggle against racism. Speaking from what he defines as a modernist perspective, Nadim outlines both political and religious goals for the group he is active in:

> Politically we want to help to create a new voice in the media, a voice that's not caught up in traditions, in dogmatic understandings of the religion. (…) Religiously we want to open up for… throughout time ever since the last prophet died the religion has been redefined and reinterpreted and there have been disputes about how to understand this and how to understand that (…) we just want to create room where it is okay to have different interpretations. And by doing that we hope to accomplish or create an understanding that it's okay to be a different kind of Muslim, that not all Islam is defined by how you were told it was supposed to be defined, you have the power to define it yourself. (…) And that's the beauty of religion in my eyes. That it is never static, it's always dynamic, it's always dependent on who you are, how you feel, your current economic situation etc.
>
> *(Nadim, Denmark)*

From a postcolonial perspective, Samira sees the struggle for social justice as the most essential. In this struggle, the anti-imperialist analysis and the religious faith strengthen each other. The Islamic doctrine and ethics of social justice also form the basis of solidarity that moves beyond Muslims as a group, extending the struggle against injustices so that it connects differently positioned social groups to each other.

> I also see a change amongst Muslim organisations, there is more discussion about racism and an understanding of racism as injustice and such things. And we Muslims are also brought up in the religious faith that social justice applies to everybody. It's not only about us Muslims, we can't fight for Muslims only. It doesn't work like that. If there are social injustices, we need to struggle against those and justice is for everybody.
>
> *(Samira, Sweden)*

For several activists, the political analysis also includes 'talking back' to hegemonic discourses that feature Muslim women as oppressed and victimised (e.g. Razack, 2004; Bilge, 2012). Instead of accepting the hegemonic representations, the participants present themselves as competent actors who re-articulate notions of gender equality (cf. Massoumi, 2015). While feminism is a resource to draw upon for a few of the activists, others refer to the Islamic faith and social organising as Muslims as a source of empowerment. For these activists, social change is about coming up with new interpretations of religion and cultural practices rather than a total break with the tradition. As Awira formulates it, there

is no need to look for ideas about women's rights elsewhere, since they can be found in the tradition itself.

> People imagine that we Muslim women don't have any rights or anything. So we have always had to fight about it, not about the rights but to fight to show people that we really have those rights. That topic has been like close to my heart, to show people that we really have that right. We don't have to fetch it somewhere. That has been important. And even in this project, that's why we tried to do everything just among us girls, like we don't need any help from outsiders. We girls can manage.
>
> *(Awira, Finland)*

Persons of Colour activism

The fifth form of postethnic activism is framed around the common experience of being a Person of Colour (PoC). This category includes all groups racialised as non-white in the Nordic context, with heritage from Africa, Latin America, the Caribbean and Asia. The established forms of PoC activism are often centred around Facebook groups or Instagram accounts, but also many events, cultural activities and campaigns mobilise on the basis of this broad category.

One example of such activism is the series of cultural events titled PoC Open Mic that started in Helsinki in 2019. The aim of the event series has been to provide an open space for Persons of Colour to perform spoken word, stand-up comedy, poetry, music, talk or whichever cultural format they wish to use. The events are open for everybody, but the performing space is given to People of Colour. The events have been organised in a variety of places: bars, cafés, local cultural centres and, during the Covid-19 pandemic, online. The organisers describe the events as a low threshold space for presenting views and performing culture, as well as seeking to centre the voices of Persons of Colour.

PoC is a broad and encompassing term which includes people racialised in different ways but who nevertheless share the experience of being treated as non-white – as a deviation from the white norm and marginalised in the existing racial hierarchies. The wide coverage of the term is valued and favoured by many, since it allows for the building of a common ground for mobilising large groups of people. It also makes explicit and directly confronts the racial hierarchy that is characteristic of the Nordic countries, as well as shaping the whole world order.

> Because whiteness is the norm, not only in the West but all over the world, so PoC refers to people who are racialised as non-white, like me. I am originally from South Asia and in English I could be called Brown. The word Brown is also used in Finnish, but I prefer this PoC term. Speaking about Persons of Colour, it unites people from several parts of the world. And it's very important to me that I identify as a PoC man (…) PoC is a bit like an umbrella term, under which all groups can be included, in my view. Since the question of race

is so important in Finland today and the world more generally.

<div align="right">*(Ryan, Finland)*</div>

Furthermore, some activists in Finland find the term PoC appealing, since it frames the common ground on being racialised as non-white and thus narrows it down from all kinds of experiences of deviating from the white Finnish norm. With this, they refer to the way the term 'racialised people' has come to be used in Finland, where also white people from South Europe or persons from the post-socialist countries, such as Russia and the Central and East European countries, can claim their being racialised due to migration experiences or ethnic difference. In Finland, where the biggest migrant groups come from Russia and Estonia, this distinction seems especially pronounced. However, some activists in Finland use the term 'racialised people' to predominantly refer to PoCs. In Sweden, the term 'racialised people' more clearly refers to Persons of Colour, while refugee groups from the Balkans and even some South Europeans can be included in the term due to their experiences of racism.

Many of the interviewed activists who participate in PoC social media groups and events find the wide community of belonging valuable. It brings together differently racialised groups and provides ground for broad acts of solidarity. As Gloria Anzaldúa (2015, p. 209) writes, in the midst of a collective experience of not fitting in "not all of us have the same oppressions, but we empathise and identify with each other's oppressions." The heterogeneity of the participants makes it possible to distinguish patterns in the operations of power and the different layers of racial classification with their effects on everyday lives. PoC activities enable a learning from experiences that differ from one's own, yet can be understood as constituted within the same racial order.

> Really interesting discussions for example in one rather big Facebook group, with several thousand members, this kind of People of Colour group, where we talk about… these are not similar… like generally, when we talk about racism it's connected to African-Americans and slavery and that kind of histories. But it's very different when somebody who comes from a Middle-Eastern country for example tells (…) very different things but they work within the same power structures, if you will, the preconceptions about Arabs are very different from those related to Black people or those with African-American background (…) It's great that we can be here together.

<div align="right">*(Lucas, Finland)*</div>

Not surprisingly, this wide community of belonging also creates issues. These reflect largely similar processes to those identified with political blackness in the UK. It developed around notions of unity and shared experiences of racism, but was later criticised for insensitivity and disregarding of differences related to the diverse processes of racialisation and the self-identifications of especially the South Asian and Afro-Caribbean groups (Alexander, 2018). Unlike the UK in the 1970s, the racialised

minority populations in the present Nordic societies are not characterised by a few clearly demarcated groups. Instead, they consist of groups with origins and family ties in a variety of countries across the world. Nevertheless, the activists commented on distinctions that are made between the African, Asian and Latin American diasporas, and while they are usually not thought of as having major relevance, tensions do sometimes arise. The most commonly mentioned tension is the one between the African diaspora and other diasporas, but also some Roma activists refer to racism that they experience by those who belong to other racialised minority communities. Adenike participates in and often enjoys PoC groups and events, but is somewhat concerned about the overgeneralisation in speaking about PoC or 'racialised people,' as they hide differences and hierarchies among those racialised as non-white:

> I feel that there is a big hierarchy, especially blackness is historically and geographically placed on the lowest level, whether we are talking about [hierarchies in] Arab countries or Asian countries, where ever (…) so I'm a bit afraid that when we talk about racialised people in Finland, we may not be able to detect the power hierarchies amongst us.
>
> *(Adenike, Finland)*

Some activists discuss the dilemmas of the broad PoC term, and the related community of belonging, pondering whose experiences are centred in PoC activism and what are the silences and erasures this leads to. Robert is concerned about the place for those with mixed heritage, especially when not belonging to the African diaspora. He is not so much referring to explicit exclusions or disputes, but to the implications of discussing privilege and internal hierarchies in a way that divides PoC into most and least oppressed groups.

> In the Facebook group I don't really dare to say so much, because there is a strong understanding of who has it worst and who should just be happy. (…) It's like the posts that are shared. The posts usually have a kind of African-American stamp. And then there was somebody who explicitly said that "third culture kids don't know what they're talking about," like they have it so easy. And because people agree with that, there's comments like: yes that's it.
>
> *(Robert, Finland)*

In-betweenness and other (dis)articulations of the common

A few groups and organisations take as their starting point mixedness or the experience of being in-between. In regards to the whole spectrum of postethnic activism, however, this has been a marginal trend. It may seem surprising, given that the group with a mixed race or transracial adoptive background is not insignificant among those participating in postethnic activism. When I discussed this matter with Vincent, who identified as part of the African diaspora while having one white parent, he emphasised the effects of being treated as Black by the

surrounding society. In his view, the category of mixed race was not socially intelligible, since even discussions of blackness were of very recent origin.

> In my view, it's rather irrelevant how you define it yourself, it's largely dictated by the society how you are encountered by others, how you perceive yourself. And in Finland this history [of speaking about race] is so young, so can people distinguish if you are mixed race or if you are fully of African background? I don't think people can distinguish between those, so it leads to being treated as… people speak English to you in the streets, because even today many people can't understand that there is a whole generation of [Black] people born here.
>
> *(Vincent, Finland)*

Concomitantly, researchers Tobias Hübinette and Daphne Arbouz (2019) argue that the category of mixed race is nearly unimaginable in the Swedish context, although the population is increasingly diverse and mixed race background is common. They locate the difficulty of speaking about mixedness in the colour-blind racial grammar that is based on a division between 'Swedes' and 'immigrants.' Nevertheless, there are a few examples of postethnic groups that take mixedness as their starting point. One of them is the group publishing the Instagram account Mixed Finns, which collects stories by those who identify with mixedness and educates about antiracist concepts. In Sweden, the organisation Mellanförskapet (In-betweenness) was established in 2005 to make visible and initiate public discussions about mixed identities and in-between positions experienced by those with mixed race parents, transracial adoptees and children of immigrants. The common denominator of the group was the feeling of not being completely Swedish, nor something else easily definable – rather it was the experience of living outside or between cultures, races and geographical contexts (Arbouz, 2012).

Mellanförskapet has gone through more and less active periods, and by the time I met with the group the establishers had moved on and new people had taken over. The interest was still on centring in-betweenness: to articulate a perspective that would not start from dichotomous understandings, such as white/non-white, or take for granted ethnic and racial differences. The former chair of the organisation envisioned that the narratives of the mixed experience produce a 'third space' (Bhabha, 1994) that simultaneously upholds the division into white/non-white and moves beyond such thinking (Arbouz, 2012, p. 39). The active members I met during the fieldwork presented similar views. Yasmine explained in-betweenness as both a personal feeling of not fitting in, developed in childhood, and an understanding of the normative processes that are responsible for it:

> Some people start from a feeling. Others start with a process, it's like being racialised, one is exposed to a process. These are like the two sides of a coin. So I would say that our organisation is about both of these sides.
>
> *(Yasmine, Sweden)*

The group's view of in-betweenness was very broad and encompassed several normativities, in addition to white Swedishness. It addressed LGBTQ questions in its activities and included white trans activists in the group. The broad community of belonging made sense to those active in the organisation, who saw their experiences of in-betweenness related to each other. However, not all outsiders found this kind of community building appealing. In one of the open events I participated in, Mellanförskapet presented their approach and, in the conversation part, a young woman from the Asian diaspora commented on the combination of racism and trans questions. In her view, identifying with a white trans activist was difficult and the experiences of being racialised as non-white were very different from the questions relevant to white LGBTQ people. Broad communities of belonging may have political advantages in terms of the potential to gather a multiplicity of participants, but they also make topical the limits of belongingness. Activism is dependent on the ability of the participants to experience a sense of belonging, as well as a political commitment to the analyses and aims of the group.

A somewhat similar understanding of in-betweenness was developed in urban activism, as discussed earlier in this chapter. Creole was an identity category adopted by the local group of the organisation Megafonen (The Megaphone) in one of Stockholm's suburbs, Hässelby/Vällingby, addressed in detail in a published report (Tasin and Landehag, 2015). It approached in-betweenness from an explicitly postcolonial perspective and gave it a more narrow meaning than the broad understanding of Mellanförskapet with its focus on normativities. Creole referred especially to young people with a family background in Africa, Asia and Latin America, many of whom lived in the marginalised suburbs of Swedish cities.

> We are a new social group that is slowly taking form and growing in the Swedish society. We are a group that so far has not identified ourselves as a group. We are a group that, paraphrasing Frantz Fanon, is not yet white, not anymore completely non-white, and therefore is *les damnés*. We call the process through which we overcome this condition creolising and those who recreate themselves in this process we call creoles.
>
> *(Tasin and Landehag, 2015, p. 5)*

Although the postcolonial analysis and theoretical framework has been an important part of Swedish postethnic activism, not only in urban activism but also in many other forms of activism discussed in this chapter, the term creole never broke through as a shared identity category. Many urban activists found the general postcolonial analysis inspiring and some started calling themselves creoles. However, the word creole created mixed responses. Those from the Latin American diaspora in particular found it hard to identify with a term that had such a clear colonial heritage and referred to not only mixedness but a privileged position in colonial hierarchies, placing creoles above African and Indigenous populations (Sernhede et al., 2019, pp. 207–208, 217–218). Its popularity among the activists thus declined with time. This process further indicates that creating a community

of belonging on the basis of mixedness has not been very successful as the *primus motor* (at least so far). Yet, it has been part of the broader theoretical resources and analyses that have been developed in postethnic activism.

Moreover, the Danish organisation Adoptionspolitisk forum has articulated questions of transraciality as part of its agenda on transnational adoptions and their societal context. When the organisation was established in 2014 it sought to reach out not only to one ethnic group, as many other adoption groups did, but to all transnational adoptees, adopters and the original parents (when possible). The organisation focuses on the political and embodied aspects of transnational adoptions, arguing that racialisation and racism are key processes in determining the lived experiences of adoptees. During my fieldwork in Denmark, many other activists commented on the importance of Adoptionspolitisk forum for creating critical discussions about race and racialisation. Binna, who participated in the organising of the activities, described their work as opening up the understanding of racism to include structural aspects of racism and identifying groups that were not publicly acknowledged as targets of racialisation. Binna argued that transnational adoptees had been represented as an assimilated group, understood as being nearly (but not quite) white Danes, which meant that their critique shook many taken for granted notions.

> We fulfilled a gap that was in the discussion, because the discussion on race in Denmark is very often connected to Islamophobia. And the problem is that racism as a structure actually targets all bodies of colour but a lot of these bodies are either invisible or silenced, because they can't relate themselves to or are not related to the ethnic groups, the Muslim groups, that are considered dangerous and whatever, the horrible debate you see in Denmark. So therefore, among transnational adoptees there was a struggle to verbalise that racism is a very important factor of being a transnational adoptee in Denmark. And when we started to speak out about it (…) there was a kind of relief amongst ourselves but there was also a curiosity about why this group that was traditionally presented as very integrated and very assimilated all of a sudden started to voice this.
>
> *(Binna, Denmark)*

Conclusions

In this chapter, I have examined five main ways of creating communities of belonging in postethnic activism and a few less common ways of articulating the 'common' in the social location of being racialised as non-white or other in the Nordic context. The analysis has shown that the 'common' is developed around political agendas; embodied experiences of racial, gendered, sexualised, and class-based power hierarchies; colonial/racial past and present; place and its social relations; and faith and ethics.

Antiracist feminist and queer of colour mobilising connects an intersectional analysis and political agenda to embodied experiences related to notably gendered, sexualised and racialised hierarchies (see also Keskinen, 2021). Urban activism in

the stigmatised neighbourhoods combines place-based mobilising with a political analysis of especially racial and class hierarchies, while certain parts of it have developed postcolonial analyses that consolidate the place-based mobilising into a global analysis. Activism built on the Black and African diaspora perspective articulates the relevance of the colonial and racial past to present racial inequalities and structures of racism. It includes strands that take their main inspiration from the African-American political struggles and those that focus on Pan-Africanism and thinkers from the African continent. Black culture is a source of strength for a variety of approaches.

Muslim groups that address racism and Islamophobia combine a political analysis of the social position of Muslims, in the Nordic countries and globally, with a faith- and ethics-based approach. The organisations and activists differ in their political analyses and solutions to anti-Muslim racism, as they do in terms of positioning within Islamic belief traditions. Nevertheless, they share a view on faith and ethics as a resource in the antiracist struggle. Activism built around the community of PoCs reflects the differential racialising processes in the Nordic countries and creates a link between embodied experiences and understandings of racist, sexist, heteronormative and cis-normative structures. Its broad understanding of a community of belonging has the potential to be politically effective, but it also makes visible issues of heterogeneity in a context where identity and shared experiences are emphasised.

The strength of postethnic activism lies in its multiple forms of organising, which allows for creating communities of belonging and moving between these. Postethnic activists are involved in constant work of building coalitions, both within each of the identified forms of postethnic activism, as they already consist of heterogeneous communities, and other social movements (see Chapter 5). Coalition building is about communication and development of political agendas across differences and the 'internal frontlines' (Hall, 2000) that arise partly due to the differentialist racialisation processes and partly due to the multiplicity of the lived experiences the activists draw upon when creating communities of belonging. The examples from PoC activism, described in this chapter, demonstrate how such internal frontlines can arise, but the dilemmas are shared by the whole field of postethnic activism. As the decline of political blackness in the UK in the wake of state multicultural policies and neoliberal individualisation shows, the risk of establishing "cultural barricades or the endless refinement of hierarchies of oppression" (Alexander, 2018, p. 1045) looms in the midst of coalitional politics, involving the threat of fragmentation and erosion of antiracist politics. However, the analysis from the Nordic region indicates a stronger tendency towards efforts to build coalitions and bridge arising frontlines in a search for shared political goals.

Note

1 'Blatte' is a word used about non-white people, usually migrants or their descendants. Its original meaning is derogatory, but it has also been taken up by migrants and racialised minorities as a form of self-empowerment that would change the meaning.

5

AUTONOMOUS SPACES, POLITICS AND ORGANISING

Introduction

Creating communities of belonging is not a means in itself in postethnic activism; it is connected to the politics that the activists seek to develop and promote. Establishing platforms and groups for those racialised as non-white or 'others' is a political act that creates space for new political agendas and ways of living together. These autonomous spaces are needed to take control over the definition of central political questions, set the boundaries of the community of belonging, and create representations of it that match the experiences and visions of those involved (see also Keskinen, 2021). In other words, autonomous spaces are the prerequisite of creating political subjects able to challenge the white hegemony and racial inequalities characteristic of the Nordic societies. In this chapter, I examine the relevance of autonomous organising and the three kinds of politics it gives rise to. After this, I analyse the tactics employed by the activist in determining who can participate in the activities and how this control enables the agenda setting of the groups and events they develop. I argue that the tactics are distributed along a continuum of separatism and inclusionary organising.

The emerging political subjects that develop new politics and culture are born in the interplay of 'being subjected to' and 'subjectivation' – through processes in which those treated as objects of racial and colonial rule refuse their given place within the order and become subjects in their own right (Samaddar, 2010, xiv). I understand political subjectivation as a dynamic process, in which political subjectivities are formed around a series of collective experiences and the creation of communities of belonging (cf. Modonesi, 2014, p. 1), reflecting the material relations of racial formations and racial capitalism in the Nordic region. Autonomy, thus, is relative and shaped within the existing relations of power; yet, it is important for the creation of political analysis and visions of social change. As Holloway (2014, xv) frames it: "autonomy (or self-determination) remains a dream, but living

that dream becomes central to the struggle for its realisation. In, against, beyond, or rather in-against-and-beyond, for the three should not be separated, for they are three aspects of our daily existence." The struggle involves simultaneously all three elements – of living (with)in the existing structures and hegemonies, working against these and creating political goals and ways of being together that move beyond them. Collective understandings and collective actions are the means to make this happen but also to make living bearable in a hostile and oppressive environment.

The following quote by Rita, who was active in an antiracist feminist organisation, makes explicit the benefits of autonomous organising. For her, the group provides a collective space to define central political questions and to connect to others who share an understanding of the oppressions non-white people experience. Participating in feminist organising that involved a majority of white activists would mean adapting to problem formulations and thematic focus defined by the tradition of white feminism (Keskinen, 2021), while autonomous organising provides the activists a space to create new analyses and claims. Moreover, participation in white majority feminism often meant being exposed to a questioning of the relevance of antiracism and the nature of racialised experiences.

> I think it is important, because it gives us a possibility to formulate our views without the risk of somebody questioning without really understanding what it's about. Instead we are, and there is a feeling of safety in it, in a room where we don't share the same experiences but usually have at least some kind of understanding of the experiences of the others, and don't question them. One can experience things as one does. I also think it is a strength to be able to politically formulate analyses from your specific position. We can be more radical, we can formulate views more clearly. So I think it is both about a political benefit and a personal feeling of safety. That one can feel comfortable, and feel that here we are the majority. Nobody else is formulating the relevant questions, we are.
>
> *(Rita, Sweden)*

Rita's words also indicate the different political elements that postethnic activism builds on. Her formulation shows how claims for social justice intertwine with a sense of being safe and comfortable, which I interpret as a marker of support, healing and affectionate relations – an entanglement of the politics of social justice, survival and love.

Politics of social justice, survival and revolutionary love

Postethnic activism is built on varying combinations and articulations of the politics of social justice, the politics of survival and the politics of revolutionary love. The politics of social justice is what most researchers, especially those within or inspired by the Marxist tradition, focus on when analysing antiracist politics and its linkages

with other movements of social justice, such as the feminist movement or the labour movement. While the politics of social justice is a driving force of many forms of postethnic activism, it is not possible to understand the full range of activities in this field without taking into account the relevance of the politics of survival and the politics of revolutionary love. Some parts of postethnic activism, notably those focusing on self-care and celebration of difference, might not be acknowledged for their radical and antiracist implications, unless their grounding in the politics of survival and love is made explicit. Neither are the political potential and the multifaceted appeal of such activism properly understood without all three kinds of politics.

With the *politics of social justice*, I refer to political analyses and claims making that seek to tackle racial thinking and racist structures, sometimes connecting these to power relations created by imperialism, capitalism, sexism and heteronormativity. Some of the commonly addressed themes by postethnic activists that fall within the politics of social justice include racist and colonial representations; racial ignorance and colour-blind discourses; societal structures creating unequal access to power and resources along racial and class divisions; racialising practices by the police and other authorities; and notions of national belonging based on normative whiteness. The politics of social justice provides grounds for connections between different kinds of postethnic activism but also for coalition building with other social justice movements, notably the feminist and queer movements, and anti-capitalist and class-based politics (Keskinen, 2021). Postethnic activism also brings a distinctive perspective to that of the other social justice movements, pushing questions of racism into hegemonic feminist, queer and leftist agendas.

The urban organisation Förorten mot våld (The suburb against violence), active from 2016–2019 and located in one of Stockholm's suburbs but with networks in several large Swedish cities, developed multifaceted politics of social justice. The organisation was built to counteract the frequent lethal violence taking place in the marginalised urban neighbourhoods and to provide an alternative to the securitising and othering media coverage. In mainstream media, victims of violence were described as criminals and the inhabitants in the neighbourhoods were blamed for creating 'parallel societies' that operate outside legal and democratic principles (cf. Stehle, 2012). Förorten mot våld elaborated an analysis of the reasons behind the shootings and published a list of demands to find solutions to the issues arising from spatially marked structural inequalities. By creating this agenda, the organisation not only criticised the law and order politics promoted by most Swedish political parties but also provided an alternative framing which emphasised the participation of local residents and the improvement of employment opportunities and schooling. The organisation directly addressed the Swedish government, demanding it to:

1. acknowledge that the shootings are a national emergency situation, resulting from socio-economic inequalities and structural discrimination
2. appoint a commission of inquiry to investigate what has gone wrong
3. focus more on increasing employment

4.   provide more funding for exit-programmes from criminality
5.   increase the representation, participation and insights of the local inhabitants in the neighbourhood processes
6.   improve the school system to tackle issues of young people finishing school without qualifications for upper secondary education.

(Förorten mot våld, 2017)

The organisation worked on the local level to reach out to the residents of the suburbs, as well as confronting politicians about the need to tackle structural inequalities. The spokespersons were also actively spreading their views through newspaper articles and op-eds. Moreover, Förorten mot våld participated in the large political gatherings at Almedalen – a national site for political parties, civil society organisations and media to get together yearly for a week to discuss central political questions and solutions to them.

While firmly embarked on working for the politics of social justice, Förorten mot våld also channelled the sorrow and pain of the inhabitants in the neighbourhoods, who had seen their friends, acquaintances or family members being hurt or killed in shootings in the suburbs. The number of lethal shootings in Sweden rose from 17 in 2011 to 48 in 2020, and while the general level of homicides is approximately the same as in the 1990s in relation to population size (Brå, 2021, p. 13), the recent shootings have mostly taken place in the marginalised suburbs and increased the experienced unsafety among the residents. A number of shootings have occurred in central places in the suburbs and among a crowd of people, leaving many inhabitants deeply affected by the incidents. The demonstrations Förorten mot våld organised and the texts they shared on their Facebook page articulated sentiments related to the violence in the neighbourhoods, as well as the frustration when confronted by the ignorance of politicians and parts of society not affected by the shootings.

> Many people in our neighbourhood feel frustrated over the lack of action by authorities and the government. Frustrated over politicians coming as on safari tours to our areas, without any concrete means to solve our problems. Frustrated over how media often represents the victims as criminals, which is by far not consistent with the reality.
>
> *(de la Cerda et al., 2016)*

With this in mind, I suggest that the politics of survival was also part of the way the organisation worked, although it may not have been the explicit aim of it. *The politics of survival* is a concept developed in Black feminism to articulate the collective creation (and necessity) of support and healing by those targeted by racism (Collins, 2000; Bassel and Emejulu, 2018). The politics of survival is essential in a hostile and violent environment, in which one's humanity is frequently questioned. As Sara Ahmed (2014) frames it, "to have some body, to be a member of some group, to be some, can be a death sentence. When you are not supposed to live, as

you are, where you are, with whom you are with, then survival is a radical action." The politics of survival is about collective support, self-care and resistance in contexts where everyday racism, stigmatising media representations and state violence shape the parameters of life.

The group Good Hair Day, mobilising Afro-Finns around notions of self-care and positive self-representation (see Chapter 4), emphasises the politics of survival and love as ways of strengthening the politics of social justice. Adenike, who was one of the initiators of the group, explained how the notion of politics for her at first meant organising panel discussions and developing claims of social justice, but later turned into a more multifaceted question. Politics can be even more effective when it involves performing Black beauty and counteracting the culturally produced shame connected to it in white supremacist societies (Tate, 2009, 2018) through everyday resistance and self-care. Making visible the political potential of collective support, healing and the celebration of Black beauty opens broader avenues for work towards social change and combines the affective with the rational elements of politics.

Rosa, who is active in antiracist feminism, points out how resistance and anger are important in the politics of survival. Mobilising is about resistance to the suffocating power of racial hegemony that implicates there would be no alternative to the oppressive and violent order.

> What motivates me is largely anger. That things can't be this way and that supposedly you can't do anything, can't affect anything. There's all kinds of shit and this is it [sighs] like it's about resisting hopelessness.
>
> *(Rosa, Finland)*

In the opening story of this book, I recalled the meeting with Hibo in central Malmö, at the end of which she framed activism as a question of survival and love. Both parts are, thus, important. Love is the creative element that is connected to affectionate relations and belongingness to a community where one can feel comfortable and safe. In postethnic activism, love includes a revolutionary aspect, providing strength and visions of changing the hierarchical and violent structures that shape everyday lives and global relations. As Alexandra argues, taking care of oneself, respecting and supporting each other is a radical and political act. It centres on the strength and well-being that can be achieved through collective sharing and togetherness.

> to have a space, where you can connect to people like you and be just like many things at the same time and become empowered because for once you are the centre instead of being othered. And to celebrate it and also get like… we focus very much on self-love and self-care – it's also very radical and political to increase your well-being as a racialised person.
>
> *(Alexandra, Finland)*

With the *politics of revolutionary love*, I refer both to the ways of living together that disrupt norms and conventions in order to collectively create visions of other

futures (Sandoval, 2000), and the radical potential embedded in a "praxis that links interpersonal feeling and affection to the project of revolutionary internationalism" (Havlin, 2015, p. 79). Alexandra's words above speak to and reflect on Black feminist theorising of self-care and self-love. In her analysis of Black feminist love-politics, Jennifer Nash (2013, p. 20) argues for a perspective of love as 'doing,' as labour and practice, in which love is not understood as individual romantic sentiments but as a "political call to transcending the self and transforming the public sphere." I also interpret the politics of revolutionary love to be connected to prefigurative aims that seek to create un-hierarchical social relations and deal with power imbalances within the movements themselves in parallel with politics for broader social change (Ishkanian and Saavedra, 2019). Such prefigurative aims are common also for other new social movements, which emphasise that societal structures are not detached from the relations and encounters taking place within the movements. Changing everyday social relations is an important goal as such, but also a means to create profound social change.

The feminism of colour tradition has developed understandings in which revolutionary love is about the articulation of affective ties and ethical commitments with an internationalist agenda – living 'a humanity under the skin' (Havlin, 2015). This thinking has its roots in the 1970s Chicana feminism and Third World feminism that connected local struggles for social justice in the US with anti-colonial and antiracist struggles in other parts of the world. Many of these feminists discussed the impact of affective relations and interpersonal encounters that affirmed their own local struggles when they were able to see these as part of global entanglements. Of importance for this understanding was the creation of transnational bonds with other activists. The French–Algerian intellectual and activist Houria Bouteldja (2017) argues for revolutionary love in her quest for a decolonial project that confronts global capitalism, imperialism and racism towards the 'others' of the French republic.

In line with this thinking, the antiracist activist Rosa, quoted above, was not only speaking about her own experiences of racism when presenting anger and resistance against hopelessness as the driving forces of her activism. She was also talking about state violence towards migrants fleeing to Europe in the summer and autumn of 2015 and questioning European border politics which creates precarious positions and expulsions. Rosa was not the only one deeply engaged in support activities for the newly arrived migrants in 2015 and after. Solidarity mobilisation towards the newly arrived migrants was common among the activists (see also Chapter 8).

While love cannot be thought of as existing outside power relations (Nash, 2013) and the language of love can certainly be used as a neoliberal tool to individualise and disguise hierarchical relations, its creative and radical potential should not be too easily dismissed. Gulzar Charania (2019) argues that the ways racialised minorities seek to live within structures not created to ensure their survival can sometimes seemingly bear resemblance to neoliberal ideologies, but only at a surface level. Making an interpretation of the kind of self-love and self-care practices discussed above as embedded in neoliberal individualisation would be to ignore the

impact of racism and "misread traditions of self and communal care that are not reducible to neoliberalism" (Charania, 2019, p. 14). Instead, I argue that they should be understood as expressions of the creation of a politics of survival and love, intertwined with and enhancing the repertoire of a politics of social justice.

Not only feminists of colour have examined the political and public aspects of love. In *The Fire Next Time*, James Baldwin (1963) stated that love was not a personal feeling but rather a way of being that required boldness and willingness to grow through openness and search for relationality. Even within Marxist-inspired theorising, calls have been raised to create political spaces characterised by public love (Hart and Negri, 2004), as opposed to the hegemonic privatised and heteronormative notions of love. My analysis suggests that the politics of revolutionary love is practiced also in other kinds of postethnic activism, not only in Black or other antiracist feminist groups. In urban activism, for example, social relations of support and solidarity are highly valued and create bonds between the participants. The emphasis on solidarity as a principle for social relations that Benjamin describes in the following quote can be understood as a politics of revolutionary love. Ethical everyday relations and transforming the public culture are also part of this way of thinking, although the language used is somewhat different from the previous words by Black feminist activists.

> From a solidarity perspective, if we had all tried to care about others and be the best persons we can be, and be a role model for not only my family but also for the neighbours' children and so forth, then the utopian, romantic view would be that we live in a society in which relations are defined by solidarity.
> *(Benjamin, Sweden)*

The continuum of separatism and inclusionary organising

Many of the studied groups practice variations of separatist organising as a tactic that allows them to define who can participate, speak and be listened to in the autonomous spaces created in postethnic activism. Some organisations, on the other hand, have a clear view of not organising in separatist ways. Instead, they build on inclusionary organising – yet, within the leadership of those racialised as 'others' and with clear practices of respecting personal experiences of racism. Rather than being an either-or relation, I argue that the groups build their activities on a continuum between the two poles, using a variety of tools to create productive environments for postethnic activism. Activist groups and organisations position themselves differently along this continuum – some at one or the other end of it, but most somewhere in-between.

Firstly, the groups can practice separatist organising on several grounds. Some groups are open for women and trans persons racialised as non-white; other groups are separatist for women and non-binary only but invite people across ethnic and racial boundaries; and yet others are organised as separatist activities for racialised minorities without restrictions to gender or sexual identifications. Secondly, many groups with separatist practices organise some activities that are open for everybody,

such as seminars or film events. The social media platforms that provide space for young Persons of Colour to post about their views and life stories can have comment fields that are open for anybody, or restrict the commentary to those racialised as non-white. There can also be separatist threads for non-white writers on platforms that otherwise allow posts also by white participants.

Thirdly, the inclusionary organising also includes practices that seek to ensure respectful conduct and acknowledgement of the need to navigate power relations between differently located participants. Inclusionary organising can make use of the so-called priority rule of interpretation, which means that non-white actors have the right to define their experiences of racism without being exposed to racist questioning in these spaces. Inclusionary organising also often limits the number of board members who are not part of the community at which the activities are aimed. For example, an organisation directed at persons of the African diaspora may include board members who do not belong to this group but restrict their number in order to remain focused on their target group. A group meant for those racialised as 'others' can also have two kinds of membership categories, such as the Finnish antiracist feminist organisation Fem-R. It divides between actual members, who experience being racialised (as 'others'), and supportive members, which includes other groups. Supportive members can participate in the activities in the same way as actual members, but they do not have the right to vote in the annual general meeting.

The continuum of separatism and inclusionary organising provides an array of means to navigate and restrict the effects of racialised, gendered and sexualised power relations. They enable the groups to focus on the people the activities are designed for and provide a relatively comfortable and safe discussion environment. Bahar, who led an organisation for non-white activists only but sometimes arranged events open for everybody, identifies safety as the main reason for this kind of organising. For her, safety meant not only being able to avoid blunt racism but also the white normativity that characterised many everyday spaces.

> The foundation pillar of the study circle is that it is separatist. And there are many reasons for that. (…) Partly a space where you don't have to explain things from A to Z but have a kind of understanding and share many experiences. But also (…) a safe place for persons who otherwise don't feel totally comfortable to express themselves as they want to. Because one moves in rather white spheres usually. If I just take myself as an example, at my workplace I'm one of the two who are not white. And it wears you out pretty much because it's not only about racism *grandiouse* that one can point out, but it's implicit and in the small comments that make it difficult to pinpoint what feels so uncomfortable.
>
> (Bahar, Sweden)

There is also power in separatist organising – both in terms of being able to define the political agenda and delineate the boundaries of the group. Aynoor, who is active in antiracist feminist organising both locally and on the Nordic level,

refers to the effect that the setting of boundaries has on outsiders. Separatist organising of non-white people is considered controversial in Nordic societies characterised by colour-blindness and white ignorance (see Chapter 2 on racial nordicisation). Being in control of the rules of participation can give a sense of power, although as Aynoor points out, the provocative effect has somewhat worn out with time.

> I think it's a bit of a pity that our organising doesn't provoke any more. That it is so accepted to organise yourself in a separatist way in Sweden. And you know, it is a hefty feeling when we have been for example in these Nordic meetings and it gets so… this idea that we are sitting in a room and closing the door and then you are not welcome [laughs]. And we are talking about things and you are not allowed to know what we talk about. There is something that gives you so much power.
>
> *(Aynoor, Sweden)*

Many activists point out that separatism is not a means in itself but a useful tool to take control and define the parameters of the activities. Moreover, they emphasise networking and cooperation with other groups in order not to be caught in separatist spaces. Entering white-dominated spaces as an outspokenly Black or Brown activist can be a way to bring questions of race and racism to the forefront and demand that other political actors acknowledge the lived realities of those racialised as non-white. Separatist organising also enables focusing on certain questions and creating coalitions across differences to tackle specific issues. For Mona, separatism is about making different political identities and positions distinguishable, and thus beneficial for building coalitions between social justice movements. Instead of being based on essentialised identities and ways of organising, as is often presumed, separatism for her is a tactical and strategic (Spivak, 1990) resource, which allows the activists to shift between different political identities and to connect to a vast array of political actors.

> I think separatist organising is extremely valuable. Because it trains you to go in and out of different political identities and positions. It is extremely relevant that you also, in that way, challenge people by going into the room like just: aha, but I'm Black [laughs]. It may sound silly but… it's like using it as a political identity from which to pursue certain questions together with many other people. (…) separatism should be seen as a tool that one uses to somehow affect the power(ful). And that is why it is so important with alliances and coalitions and so forth. For example, we can say that the discussion about having 2000 police officers in Husby [a racialised suburb in Stockholm], we can have an agreement with Allt åt alla, a socialist group, that it's wrong and maybe also Black Coffee [a separatist Black group], maybe also some parts of the queer movement can think that it's wrong and then we can do something together. At the same time we know that we have different interests in other areas but here and now we can do something together.
>
> *(Mona, Sweden)*

Those who have chosen to establish and organise in inclusionary groups find it useful to collect people with different positionalities together within the organisation. The feminist organisation StreetGäris has sought to develop their organisation into a broad coalition of differently located antiracist feminists. All those who accept the political goals and principles of the organisation can participate, while the leading group consists predominantly of feminists racialised as 'others.' Challenging racism and creating feminism that is more inclusive is central for the organisation's politics. The aim of such organising is to enable solidarity and mobilisation for struggles that are not necessarily one's own, and by doing so provide the basis for shared struggles.

> Zeinab: But I think we somehow felt that the experiences of being racialised [as others] were important and that they should be discussed among us. It's why I 100 percent support such separatist groups. But regarding our organisation, we have felt that these experiences need to be taken up in spaces where people who reproduce racism are present. (Lania: The structures.) And for the structures, to hear about these. Because that's where the difference takes place, and that's where change is created. And when one talks about these things.

> Lania: That's where one makes alliances. (Zeinab: Yes.) I mean it's there that one can support each other as women or non-binary persons. That's what we are lacking, in the movement, you know many people say: But I can't call her a sister or sibling because they are not pursuing my struggle. I mean we wanted to take that away and like create a common… that one can pursue each others' struggle like.
>
> *(Zeinab and Lania, Sweden)*

However, this kind of organising also means that power relations and difficulties related to cross-racial organising become part of the activities. The everyday encounters in the Facebook groups and the meetings arranged by the organisation require constant moderation, but also allow for discussion and learning processes.

Another reason for favouring inclusionary organising is located in the complexity of people's lives and the unwillingness to take fixed identities as a basis of organising. If the starting point is, as Lamin describes in the following quote, to work for the rights and enhancement of the social position of a specific group, it may be best to be open for a variety of cooperation partners and actors willing to promote the same political goal. People's lives are located at the intersections of race, gender, class and religion, among others; thus, they escape neat categorisations and clear-cut divisions. Lamin, who is the founder of an Afro-Swedish organisation, is determined to work in an inclusionary way:

> When I started this, I had none what so ever aim to start a separatist organisation. What I had in mind was to start an organisation that would be for the rights of Afro-Swedes. And I thought from an intersectional perspective. Because I'm thinking that I'm not only an Afro-Swede. We have members

who are women, Muslims, Afro-Swedes. It [organising] is only useful if we cooperate with Muslim organisations and women's organisations, because these persons also belong to these groups. So to separate this woman from her other identities is like in some sense taking away her identity from her. I am a man but not only a man. I am an Afro-Swedish man.

(Lamin, Sweden)

In the public sphere, separatist organising as non-white or racialised 'others' has led to instances of racial panic in which the white-dominated mainstream media frames the issue as "white people not being allowed to participate" (Oscarson, 2019) in separatist groups. Several interviewed activists in Finland talked about the aggressive response to a separatist space at the Feminist Forum, a gathering of many feminist activists and groups in Helsinki in 2016. One of the first instances of separatist organising during an otherwise open social event, the session became the focus of wide publicity. It was titled "No whites allowed," which was commented on in heated social media discussions and picked up by right-wing populist politicians and extreme right activists. The organisers of the session had to deal with the social media turbulence and prepare precautions to ensure the safety of the event, in addition to taking care of their own safety and well-being. Linda, who was the main organiser of the session, recalls being surprised that the name of the event was interpreted so differently from her intentions. The act of naming race and problematising the racial order was unintelligible in the context of racial nordicisation, with its colour-blind racism and its denial of racialised realities (see Chapter 2). Moreover, Linda experienced a lack of solidarity from white activists, who held her to blame for the racist reactions.

I thought about the name for a long time and maybe I was naïve to presume that we live in a highly educated society, people have studied and thus have a general level of knowledge. So I thought the reference to Jim Crow times was pretty clear (…) how absurd the idea of race is. But no. Later many people have been like, why did you give it such a name, what did you expect, and like you are provoking it.

(Linda, Finland)

Conclusions

This chapter has examined how activists mobilise and organise around three kinds of politics: the politics of social justice, the politics of survival and the politics of revolutionary love. Firstly, it has shown how the activists work for the creation of social justice, through a critique of racism, class-based inequalities, sexism, hetero- and cis-normativity, as well as developing initiatives that aim for social change. Secondly, I have examined the politics of survival (Collins, 2000; Bassel and Emejulu, 2018) as a form of resistance, self-care and healing that is necessary in the violent environment of white hegemony, structural racism and political hostility. Thirdly, the chapter has looked at how activists seek to develop a

politics of revolutionary love, which addresses the ways of living together and building affectionate relations through activism that create the ground for a better future (Sandoval, 2000; Nash, 2013). The politics of revolutionary love also includes the notion of working together for a radical global change (Havlin, 2015; Bouteldja, 2017).

The chapter has further analysed the tactics and strategies of the activists, ranging from separatism to inclusion, and their thoughts on coalition building with other social movements. It has identified the different ways of understanding and using separatism to ensure 'autonomous spaces,' as well as examining ways of organising in which the boundaries of 'autonomous spaces' are made more porous and inclusivity is emphasised. It has argued that activist groups and organisations position themselves on different points of the continuum between separatism and inclusion, rather than a simple either–or standpoint. All of the diverse ways of organising provide possibilities for cooperation with other movements.

6

NEW REPRESENTATIONS, CULTURAL WORK AND NAVIGATING NEOLIBERAL RATIONALITIES

Introduction

The development of digital media has opened avenues for far right politics and racist communication to increasingly circulate in the hybrid media space (e.g. Titley, 2019a; Pyrhönen et al., 2021). However, it has also generated new possibilities for postethnic activism by providing channels for communication and the creation of communities of belonging for those racialised as 'others' in the Nordic region. Facebook groups and Instagram accounts directed at racialised minorities or established to discuss postcolonial and antiracist questions have enabled a get-together and exchange of thoughts that is detached from physical place – thus allowing those from smaller cities and rural areas to also participate in the discussions. Blogs and personal social media accounts have provided space for stories about experiences of racism and articulations of antiracist standpoints. Some postethnic activists have established collective media sites, through which journalistic content, podcasts and videos are distributed. In this chapter, I discuss the development of postethnic digital media activism, its connecting points with professional cultural work and the neoliberal logic of individualisation and entrepreneurialism in the context of racial capitalism.

Previous research has critically examined the effects of digital media on politics, arguing that it has led to a lack of long-term commitment to political organising, increasingly individualised communication patterns and extensive commercialisation (Nikunen, 2019, pp. 133–135). All these characteristics are seen as fragmenting and weakening the radical potential of social movements. Criticising the neoliberal ethos of social media, Natalie Fenton and Veronica Barassi (2011, p. 181) argue that "self-centered media production practices, which are promoted by social media, represent a challenge to the construction and dissemination of political messages that are born out of the efforts and negotiations of a collective." Moreover, the autonomy of and potential for distributing new views through alternative

media sites is hampered by their "resource precarity and lack of visibility" in the media landscape controlled by a few transnational media companies (Fuchs, 2015, p. 367). Nevertheless, recent studies on feminist online activism and racial justice hashtag activism have concluded that digital activism can counteract the neoliberal individualising logic and, instead, create effective tools for collective action (Baer, 2016; Scharff et al., 2016; Kuo, 2018). The development of Black Lives Matter from hashtag activism to a transnational movement is a vivid example of the power of social media but also of the work needed to build a movement offline (Taylor, 2016). In this chapter, I examine how postethnic activists navigate this contradictory terrain and how digital media, despite certain challenges, creates new means for activism.

Cultural work can be understood as "the work of symbol creators" (Hesmondhalgh, 2013, p. 20 quoted in Fuchs, 2015, p. 8). Changing representations and pushing new cultural-political perspectives to the public sphere has brought together a range of postethnic actors from grass roots activists to freelance journalists and artists. They seek to challenge the racial order and reformulate representations of race, gender, sexuality and class. These actors engage in what in Gramscian terminology is termed 'the war of position,' the long-term work of changing cultural meaning-making processes and disrupting the existing racial, gender and class hegemony (Gramsci, 1978; Mohanty, 2003; Omi and Winant, 2015). This kind of political change takes place in times when abrupt and revolutionary change is not possible, or not deemed desirable.

Protests, demonstrations and membership in political organisations are not the only ways to create social change. Nor are they appealing forms of mobilising for everyone who wishes to transform cultural and social institutions. Mira, a Finnish blogger, writer and media site developer, points out that her engagement to create change comes from very personal experiences, together with an understanding of the implications of colonial representations in culture and the arts. Her motivation to act comes from the need to rewrite existing narratives and disrupt racist conventions, but also from the feeling that cultural production is her field of action.

> I have not been attracted by demonstrations or any groups like that. I haven't known anybody and not really felt the need to know anybody. I've always started from an everyday and personal basis (…) like this is the matter I know about because I exist and I don't really know so much about other things (…) I wanted to work in the field of culture, art and music (…) but even art includes the colonial question. These stories have been told, written about and shown in films and photography for so long, producing these colonial representations… so I just have to do things that can break that tradition.
>
> *(Mira, Finland)*

The positions from which to challenge cultural representations and bring new questions to the public sphere vary, depending on the share of voluntary work and professional work included. While the development of digital media has resulted in the increase of groups participating in cultural production through the creation of

social media content (Banks et al., 2013), it has also blurred the boundary between unpaid and paid media work. The step from updating social media accounts and producing alternative media content into becoming employed as a professional media worker may not be open for all postethnic activists, but several of them have been invited to write columns and blogs, or edit special issues, in mainstream media outlets. Many work as freelance journalists, communicators or within the artistic field, weaving the work of changing representations and disturbing racial hegemony into their everyday professional tasks or certain parts of it. A study of the cultural effects of and the representational work in postethnic activism, therefore, has to account for the movement between activism and professional cultural work, and the combining of these that some actors are involved in. Moreover, these processes bring us to the discussion on racial capitalism and its characteristic of marketing differences, as well as the production of differential hierarchisation and racialised precarity (Roediger, 2017; Bhattacharyya, 2018).

Digital spaces for sharing stories and mobilising politically

Instagram accounts and Facebook groups are especially effective means for connecting and mobilising those racialised as 'others.' They also allow for a sharing of stories based on lived experiences and discussing themes related to racism, antiracism, postcolonialism, intersectionality and other matters of interest to the target group(s). Some of the organisers of postethnic media platforms even met on social media, locating each other through likeminded Twitter activity and deciding to join forces collectively. Deniz, one of the young women who established the discussion site Makthavarna (The Power Holders) on Instagram, argues that social media is a perfect site for organising. It is an accessible, costless and easy way to reach out to young racialised minority people.

> Because internet and social media are part of one's life, especially if you are a young person, it's self-evident that you have social media accounts. And it's also very accessible. It doesn't matter if you are rich or poor, whether you live in Stockholm or Malmö or any other place, you can just join. And it's costless. It's a very effective and easy way to reach people, everybody has an Instagram account, at least in the group we aim to target. It's easy to see and like and read. You don't have to do anything actively to read Makthavarna, it's part of the everyday already. (…) I remember the day we launched the account, it received so many followers and we got so many comments. It was so easy. We didn't have to pay for travel tickets or book a venue or any of these things you need to take care of for a physical meeting.
>
> *(Deniz, Sweden)*

Makthavarna, active from 2014–2019, was organised as a separatist account that provided space for new guest posters every week and restricted the commentary field only to those racialised as 'others.' As an open site, anybody could go in and

read the posts, but the organisers wanted to give the floor to the stories and thoughts of young racialised minority persons, especially women who they saw were often marginalised in public spaces. According to Deniz, the platform was intended as a space for racialised minority people to get together and "exhale" – also the restrictions on commenting were established to produce a discussion area that would be safe for those it was targeted at (Collins, 2000). The organisers set the rules of the platform, making it clear that it was an antiracist and feminist site, but that the topics discussed could be multiple. Every week a new guest poster introduced themselves and had the chance to voice their experiences or thoughts in one post each day, followed by active commentaries and discussion. The personal stories, often starting with a subjective modality of "I feel that" or "In my experience," created an open and dialogical form of communication, in which several perspectives and experiences were welcomed (Idevall, 2015). Thus, the site was a space for multiple voices and new perspectives arising from the interests of the guest posters, covering a variety of experiences and modes of racialisation but also topics such as hierarchies among racialised minorities and finding one's own path as a young non-white person.

The organisers also sought to make sure the site was accessible and did not use too academic language, which could exclude working class readers. According to Deniz, approaching structural oppression from the perspective of personal everyday stories is a pedagogical tool to enable inclusiveness in terms of class and education:

> We think it is important to use accessible language so that everybody can recognise themselves and understand what is written. Not everyone has an academic background (…) That's why we also think that writing about experiences is more effective and easier to understand than writing about statistics or sheer 'facts.'
>
> (Deniz, Sweden)

Referring to accessibility and demands on academic knowledge, Deniz makes a distinction between Makthavarna and some other separatist media platforms in Sweden, such as Rummet (The Room), also established by four young racialised minority women and often picked up in mainstream media. The team organising Makthavarna had also made a different choice concerning personal visibility than Rummet and some other separatist accounts. Not putting up front the names of the organisers was a deliberate choice. First, they did not want Makthavarna to be represented only by a few individuals; second, media visibility led to aggressive hate mail and racist commentaries, which the organisers wanted to avoid.

> The few times we have been in the public sphere, it has been very unpleasant. We organisers have some experiences of being verbally abused and harassed by racists on the internet and we don't want that. So we've made the decision that we'll rather go for being half anonymous than be in the first line and show who we are. (…) We have been interviewed in Nyheter 24 [media site] and written a debate article to *Metro* magazine, we have also written a text for

the magazine *Nöjesguiden* (…) So it has been good to be visible, of course we want to be visible. But not at the cost of our safety.

(Deniz, Sweden)

Media visibility is, thus, a double-edged sword for postethnic activists. It allows the target audiences to find the platform and for the platform to serve as a 'counterpublic' (Squires, 2002; Kuo, 2018) that feeds new perspectives into public discussions, but it also exposes activists to racist hate speech. Even more so, my interest is in the way the organisers of Makthavarna refused to play with the individualising media logic that seeks to name, introduce and consume the stories of young non-white activists. They opted out of the neoliberal media rationality, mainly writing their own texts about Makthavarna and highlighting the role of the guest posters – the collectivity they had established online.

Social media allows activists to share stories and engage in discussions, but also to mobilise and initiate campaigns. Mobilisation and activities are often strengthened by physical meetings, which create deeper commitment and interactive spaces for sharing thoughts. Black Coffee, which gathered members of the African diaspora in Sweden, combined separatist social media organising with local groups. Bisrat emphasises the creative potential of meeting face-to-face, learning together and talking to each other:

We have always said that the Facebook forum and social media communication is a tool for us to meet in the real world and create change. I think that (…) mobilising on social media can be complementary or make the communication easier, but it can never replace the kind of events where we meet, learn together, organise ourselves, mobilise together and talk amongst ourselves in physical spaces. Social media can't replace what happens during those meetings.

(Bisrat, Sweden)

Closed Facebook groups for those racialised as non-white or 'others' are not necessarily 'enclaves' (Squires, 2002; Kuo, 2018) that would be detached from the broader public sphere. Instead, they provide a space for organising interventions, public debates and discussing interpretations of specific events and responses to racism in mainstream media channels. Even social media groups organised in a separatist way can function as 'counterpublics,' in which campaigns and other collective responses are developed. They are then played out in the hybrid media sphere, in the interplay of social media and mainstream media, as the following quote by Bisrat exemplifies:

Social media mobilisation is quick: something is happening in the US or somewhere else; we meet in Black Coffee, spread the news as quickly as possible, go out and take the discussion. But it's also a place where we can talk together about what this is, what we think about this matter, what does it

mean. (…) So people had reacted on her video [by a white social media influencer] where she was racist and homophobic, she is a kind of social media profile. Then I said: but let's use the power we have, let's all go to the homepage of TV4 and write and react to this. That's what we did and started seeing that there is power in doing this.

(Bisrat, Sweden)

A social media campaign that many activists in Sweden mentioned as important for the antiracist struggle was the #hijabuppropet (Hijaboutcry) on Twitter in 2013. Started by five activists, the campaign placed focus on the harassment of and violence towards Muslim women who wear the headscarf in public spaces. The campaign spread widely in Sweden and was covered by foreign news media, such as BBC News and Al-Jazeera (Rosencrantz, 2013). Rania, who was one of the initiators of the hashtag campaign, describes long-standing knowledge of the existence of such harassment and witnessing a lack of public action to tackle it. The campaign was launched after a serious offence towards a pregnant Muslim woman, with the aim of counteracting the violence towards hijabis.

This is never talked about, it's like oppression in the public space that women in Sweden feel that they don't have access to the public space because of what they choose to wear. Then a pregnant woman in Farsta [suburb in Stockholm] was abused by a guy, her head was banged against a car and things like that. It ended up as a small item in the news. So I thought: we need to take away that small news item, show that this is systematic. So we wrote a debate article, myself and four others (…) and included a list of demands for the Minister of Justice, saying that we want these crimes to be taken seriously. Because many of the police reports are just laid down. (…) It was both about Islamophobia and about a feminist matter that women should have the right to dress in the way they want, end of story.

(Rania, Sweden)

Rania describes the hashtag campaign as a rather spontaneous initiative which nonetheless went viral and attracted broad publicity. It combined demands on governmental actions that would tackle the issue with a call to all "fellow sisters – religious or non-religious" to wear the hijab for one day as a marker against harassment and violence towards Muslim women (Osman et al., 2013). When reflecting on the action, Rania distances herself from neoliberal entrepreneurialism and public relations consulting, to which some people have connected the success of the campaign. For her, activism is not compatible with marketing logic. Nevertheless, as the #hijabuppropet shows, social media activism can be successful in creating interventions in mainstream publics by raising new questions and providing space for marginalised actors.

We didn't know that it would become so big, we had no idea at all. Suddenly the next day it just exploded with a huge number of people participating and it was

on international news and you know in all media outlets… I don't know why actually, perhaps because it was the right moment or I have no idea. Some people think it was extremely good PR, that we tried to do a PR thing. But PR has never been my… I'm an activist, I'm not a PR consultant. Do you see what I mean? Sure, from a PR perspective it was very appealing.

(Rania, Sweden)

The previous examples show that the individualising logic is not the whole story of social media communication. Postethnic activists use it in many ways to support collective action: to spread information and mobilise people; to share experiences and create fora for collective discussions; to develop 'counterpublics' and organise actions that challenge hegemonic understandings and practices. Individualism and collective organising can even work together, not necessarily in opposition. As the following quote shows, the individualism of Twitter as a forum for circulating views and commentaries about racial politics can be personally rewarding, but social media also enables the creation of collective platforms from which to speak. Advit, who was one of the founders of the Finnish organisation Fem-R (Racialised feminists), recalls his motivation to build a community with other racialised minority activists as a wish to balance the individualism of social media activism. A large part of Fem-R activities is focused on publishing statements, opinion pieces and other texts on their website, and engaging in media debates, although the group also organises meetings for members and other smaller events.

I posted my views on Twitter and shouted things there. That was perhaps a kind of individual influencing for me. And for some reason people like what I shout there. But I needed, I think that was the reason why I wanted to establish this organisation, to find support for my own activism and also peer support and doing things together (…) the blog texts on our homepage, there's no disclaimer that this is just the view of the writer, all the texts published there represent Fem-R as an organisation. For me, the group is very important. One finds support and energy and can bring energy to other people. We have to bear frequently this rubbish, so to be able to be together and do things together, to see that we are not alone with this [is important].

(Advit, Finland)

New media sites and changing representations

Postethnic mobilisation has also resulted in the establishment of new media sites, podcast series and video sites, often growing out of activism or antiracist blogging. This alternative media is participating in the politics of representation (Hall et al., 2013), seeking to create representations that participate in the contestation of power relations and structural disadvantages related to race, gender, sexuality and class. As Gavan Titley (2019a, p. 38) summarises, "under conditions of massively unequal access to symbolic resources, the process of representation cannot be

separated from the power to represent, and the cultural power of representations from prevailing socio-political relations and structures." The new media sites are aimed at challenging normative whiteness and racist structures, as well as reflecting the everyday lives and matters of interest of racialised minorities.

One of the first activist-led websites was the Swedish Rummet (The Room), mentioned in the previous section. Active from 2013–2014, Rummet was established by four young women racialised as non-white – Valerie Kyeyune Backström, Camila Astorga Díaz, Judith Kiros and Mireya Echeverría Quezada. They had been active writing their own blogs and producing podcasts before Rummet, but then decided to join forces and create a media site for conversations on antiracism and feminism. On the website, the establishers published their own texts and invited guest writers. The separatist site experimented with producing content that would start from the perspective of those racialised as 'others,' instead of relying on hegemonic representations. As one of the establishers told me: "the only rule we had for writing on our site was to reformulate the notion of 'us' so that we all the time write to somebody who is also racialised [as other]."

In a short time, the Rummet website published a large number of texts, videos and conversations, addressing themes such as white dominance in media production, the racialised and gendered body, belonging and place making (Hultén, 2019). A book with the same title included a large group of writers to discuss beauty, pleasure, popular culture, career, family and intimate relations, from the perspective of the racialised 'others' (Backström et al., 2015). The unapologetic critique of racialisation and racism in Swedish society, as well as the separatist organising of the website, caught the interest of mainstream media. Interviews in news media provided space for the four activist-writers' views, but they were also heavily criticised in editorials and debate articles in the leading newspapers. The website and its four activist-writers became part of a news media launched debate on identity politics, to which they brought their arguments and criticism over the terms on which the debate took place.

After Rummet, the four activist-writers continued to work in journalism and art critique, both in large established media houses and alternative feminist media. In 2019, Mireya Echeverría Quezada and Judith Kiros established the website Kontext Press, together with other antiracist feminist and queer cultural workers. Kontext Press is an independent media site that describes itself as a "transmedial platform for considerate journalism and critical entertainment."[1] It publishes texts, podcasts and videos grouped under three themes: politics, culture and life, as well as a section on post-Covid-19. Like Rummet, the media site is based on voluntary work, involving a group of responsible editors and several temporary contributors.

Independent podcasts have also developed into effective tools for the spreading of antiracist and feminist views. The podcast Raseriet (Rage) by Fanna Ndow Norrby and Amie Bramme Sey has been active since 2016 and in the wake of the Black Lives Matter demonstrations 2020 it became one of the most popular podcasts in Sweden (Andersson, 2020). Before starting the podcast, Fanna Ndow Norrby had established the widely followed Instagram account Svart kvinna (Black

woman), which collected examples of everyday racism and the sexual exotisation of Black women. The Raseriet podcast has continued to discuss some of these topics, but broadened its focus to timely topics on popular culture, racism and social relations. Another widely spread antiracist feminist podcast in Sweden was Arga flickor (Angry girls) by Wendy Francis and Nora Dome Nelson, produced in 2015–2017. Wendy Francis had a background in the antiracist feminist organisation Interfem and continued with activism during the production of the podcast. She described the podcast in the following manner:

> From the beginning, the aim has been to shake up the stereotype of anger, especially society's view on angry Black women and others who are racialised [as non-white]. We emphasise that we do not voluntarily go around and bring up how the world looks like, it is rather about making people understand why we are angry. Arga Flickor directs the spotlight on uncommon topics with the help of interesting guests, such as artists, musicians, entrepreneurs, activists and other actors who during the conversation inspire to creativity and finding solutions to problems we walk around thinking about.
>
> (Arga flickor, 2016)

In Finland, the website Ruskeat Tytöt Media (Brown Girls Media) has been influential since its establishment in 2017. The media site grew out of the popular blog of Koko Hubara, which she later extended to an essay collection (Hubara, 2017). Hubara collected a group of young activists and cultural workers to produce "an independent online publication committed to centering and normalising the perspectives of Brown women and people with underrepresented genders."[2] The website describes itself as a cultural media outlet operating on the principle of "by us for us," referring to the fact that all content producers and the intended audience consists of people racialised as non-white or 'others' in Finnish society. The word Brown is understood as an umbrella term that covers people addressed in public as, for example, ethnic minorities, foreigners, immigrants, and people with foreign or immigrant background. The understanding of who is Brown is, however, not predetermined, but involves the aspect of self-identification. The independent format and the combination of an editorial team with a number of contributors aim to create new representations and cover topics appealing to the racialised 'others.' Ruskeat Tytöt Media is also well known by mainstream media actors, and its novel perspective in the Finnish media field has had a considerable effect on political and cultural discussions on racialisation, representation and normative whiteness. Unlike some of the other alternative media sites discussed here, Ruskeat Tytöt Media has decided to pay its editors and contributors for their work, seeking to ensure both professional quality and fair working conditions.

The hostile and repressive discussion environment in Denmark has not been favourable for the development of alternative media sites by racialised minority actors. Nevertheless, several bloggers are actively contributing to articulate perspectives from racialised minority communities and discussing racism. The magazine

Marronage was launched to commemorate and examine the political implications of the centenary of the sale of the former Danish colonies in the Caribbean to the US in 1917. Marronage is also the name of the decolonial feminist collective producing the magazine, in addition to which it publishes other texts, organises events and participates in protests. The collective defines its work as revealing "the continued links between colonialism and state racism, while writing our own histories along traditions and struggles that are marginalised, oppressed and made invisible."[3] The name Marronage refers to organised resistance by enslaved persons. Organised as a BIPOC (Black, Indigenous and People of Colour) separatist collective, Marronage actively cooperates with many feminist, trans, migration, urban and racialised minority activists and organisations. In Danish public debates, actors addressing the structural and systemic elements of racism have been harshly attacked and knowledge about racism has been dismissed (Danbolt and Myong, 2019). Marronage has been among the actors targeted by such negative media attention.

As the previous examples show, the new media sources established by postethnic activists have been, on the one hand, at the centre of media fascination and, on the other hand, media-led debates on identity politics and racism, with aggressive tones and questioning of their agendas. The platforms have functioned as 'counterpublics,' feeding new perspectives and arguments in public discussions on racism, whiteness and culture. Nevertheless, their main agenda has been to produce content that appeals to and articulates the (multiple) perspectives of racialised minority people, and by doing so, to change representations of these groups.

Vincent, who participates in producing media content, identifies changing representations and visual imagery of especially blackness as his main interest. Even more than the critique of hegemonic representations, his enthusiasm is directed at creating images and narratives of the ignored histories of the African diaspora in Finland and the multiplicity of experiences among Black Finns.

> representations are very much at the centre of everything I do because… if you challenge the ways of showing blackness in mainstream media and the representations about us, you also challenge the way people see us in the society. The more contexts we can provide to Finnish blackness, the better people can understand that we are not a monolith. We are many kinds of people, we have different interests, some of us are born here, others are adults or elderly… the first wave of people from Africa came in the 1970s, the history is a lot longer than people often think.
>
> *(Vincent, Finland)*

Many non-white artists have had a crucial role in challenging hegemonic representations and creating new ones from the perspective of those racialised as 'others.' Some of them view activism as a part of their work or participate in activism in addition to their art work. Mandy, who is an artist and cultural worker, thinks that both activism and art are important for cultural change, but they provide somewhat different tools for this work. In her view, activism is needed to

affect the power structures of the art world, while art is the field of transgression that enables its performers to disturb the existing social order.

> art can use activist means as well, but I think that activism is usually more direct, like I have a problem and I do things to change that problem. Or this world in which I live doesn't accept me and now I do concrete things to change it. But (…) I have started to make art like intuitively because there is a possibility to transgressiveness and utopias and because it's a place where I can even for a moment share some positions or be somebody else or expand my experience of identity. The potential that is there is sometimes difficult to articulate, but it can actually break the boundaries or shake them or make visible that there is a fictive boundary here.
>
> *(Mandy, Finland)*

Cultural work between activism and professionalism

As the previous section shows, the borders between activism and cultural work are porous in the media and art field. Some activists have gained media visibility and moved on to write columns in news media and lead radio programmes. Independent podcasts and online sites have found large audiences, and a few activist-writers have attracted the interest of publishing houses. Referring to this kind of process in relation to the media site Rummet, Gunilla Hultén (2019, p. 28) argues that the activists have advanced from marginal media positions to the core of the "elite media." However, such interpretations risk simplifying both the effects of subversive efforts to address structural racism and the process of (not) accessing powerful positions in cultural work as a racialised minority actor. In the following, I will show how "symbolic, aesthetic and creative labour" (Banks et al., 2013, p. 4) in the field of media and arts is embedded in racialised precarity and expectations of adopting the 'entrepreneurial ethos' (Scharff, 2018), as well as in racialised hierarchies within the workplace. Nevertheless, freelancing and project-based work provide possibilities for some racialised minority actors to choose interesting tasks and move between activism and professional work, building on their own interests.

   The media sites created by racialised minority actors include an impressive amount of content and ambitious aims of social and cultural change, but they also demand a huge amount of work. A large part of it is based on voluntary work and even the sites that pay their editors or contributors seldom provide enough to cover a full income for the activist-cultural workers. The time devoted to activism competes with the need to earn one's living and gain a relatively safe position in the racialised labour market. What outsiders may interpret as moving up on the career ladder and leaving activism aside may for the activists themselves be a solution to exhaustive working conditions and time management. Mona, who was part of developing a social media platform that gradually waned, answered my question about what happened by saying:

> Stress and work happened. Tragically enough. But we have never been so good in this [laughs] advertising or similar things. Like we have never earned money from the platform. We have always had jobs in addition to it. And that was just too much for us.
>
> *(Mona, Sweden)*

Media and cultural work in today's neoliberal context is characterised by precariousness, involving "contested availability and the uneven distribution of its internal and external rewards (among them, pay, working conditions, prospects and status)" (Banks et al., 2013, 4). Freelancing and insecure personal economies, together with gendered and racialised inequalities, are the conditions within which competition for work and possibilities of success take place. However, cultural work is also a source of pleasure, self-realisation and autonomy. The dual nature of cultural work, in which precarity and pleasure are tightly interwoven (Scharff, 2018), explains the appeal but also the exhaustiveness of work that is organised as "individualised labour, operating in industries that stress the virtues of self-reliance, unique talent and personalised, performative modes of work" (Banks and Hesmondhalgh, 2009, p. 420).

Moving from activism to freelance journalism in larger media houses, and between these two, often involves presenting ideas of programmes or news stories and 'pitching' them to media houses and publishers. Even when being controversial, young racialised minority actors can be seen as bringing in new exciting perspectives that attract readers and listeners. Employing them to produce a specific programme in an otherwise conventional and white-dominated media outlet also functions as a moral legitimation and an asset for the media company to avoid accusations of a lack of diversity.

> It was actually Sara who pitched our programme to [large media house]. I thought it was really surprising that we got there. (…) I think they like really want to show that they respect all views somehow. And if you have us [laughs], if you have us there you can also get away with doing many other things. "See here, we have these two, they can say what they want." And that kind of things. But yeah, it's fun to be able to take part in that too [laughs].
>
> *(Mona, Sweden)*

The 'new spirit of capitalism' that (re)produces commitment to capitalism on the moral grounds of autonomy, liberation, creativity and authenticity (Boltanski and Chiapello, 2005; du Gay and Morgan, 2013; Munro and O'Kane, 2021) has a racial dimension. Media houses providing space, to a limited degree, to racialised minority actors can justify their cultural production and appear as promoters of liberation, diversity and authentic voices, while avoiding profound changes in media structures or content. Mona's quote shows both an acknowledgement of her positioning in the racialised, classed and gendered hierarchies and the pleasure of being able to use that position to create radical content. The pleasure she expresses may be related to being

able to reach out to broad audiences through mainstream media, but I interpret it also as a reference to the subversiveness of young racialised minority women taking over powerful positions in order to 'speak truth to power' (Collins, 2019).

Natalie, who received a positive response from a local media house to her suggestion to lead a programme on racism and feminism, also mentions her surprise when the programme idea was accepted. Both Mona and Natalie refused to act in accordance with the individualised and self-reliant worker ideal with a unique talent. Instead, they suggested several programme leaders to the media houses and emphasised a collective way of working when preparing the programme.

> I thought that this will never go through, it's way too progressive and we will be accused for being racist (…) At first, I thought maybe we should be three programme leaders. Then it ended up with the two of us. I had already, before making the proposal, checked a bit different social media fora and with friends, because I really wanted it [the choice of the programme leaders] to be an open and transparent process and in order to find people who really want to do this, who burn for it.
>
> *(Natalie, Sweden)*

Having some suggestions accepted by the media houses is no guarantee against exposure to racialised precarity, since the work of freelancers involves a constant search for new jobs and opportunities for short-term or part-time projects. Natalie articulates the insecurities of media work by describing a situation in which persons racialised as non-white can be replaced by fresh Brown faces and exploited as flexible labour, contrasting this with worthy working conditions based on permanent employment and equal terms.

> You don't become permanently employed, no, that's the issue and that's why it also looks like the media houses have included so many. But they may just work three weeks or half a year, then they are exchanged for others or they work as trainees or similar. And it's not about permanent employment and equal terms, it's about this fear of being thrown out because now another Brown person is taken in.
>
> *(Natalie, Sweden)*

Faiza, who combines activism with seeking a job as journalist, has experiences of racialised precarity. She also points out the exhausting nature of the process, when one is very enthusiastic for topics related to racism, culture and society, but needs to constantly struggle in the highly selective labour market from the disadvantaged position as a racialised minority person. This combination exposes racialised minority freelancers to burnout and other stress-related symptoms. In Faiza's view, the promises of creative and secure positions in media work are only fulfilled for a small number of racialised minority actors.

> I've just like jumped between different newspapers and radio channels and so forth. But these haven't been any long-term contracts. (…) I don't know how

long I will keep on doing this. I burn for what I do and so forth, but just psychologically and physically it takes a lot of energy and strength from me. If you don't get any response when you stamp and shout about what is actually needed (…) then you aren't going to be there much longer. You can't. Either you get burned out, which many do, so this process is also about feeling stressed and pressed from different directions. Or you succeed in finding a place for yourself. But it's really like a chance in a million. Some people have done this, they work in more permanent conditions, but they are not many.

(Faiza, Sweden)

Those who do make it into the media houses dominated by white journalists witness other kinds of issues. For them, the contrast with the activist field is striking. Racialised minority journalists may also be directed to a narrow scope of topics to work with, predominantly related to migration, racism, marginalised suburbs or criminality. Rachel makes explicit the burden of the individualising work environment and of being cut off from the supporting activist collectivity. The pressures to participate in the entrepreneurial ethos, involving neoliberal branding and building of one's own media profile, are much stronger when working full-time in mainstream media.

I think we are missing an understanding that even though some of us have been picked up as individuals to work in these white media spaces… one should have an understanding of the things we meet every day at work, being racialised by others at the workplace, required to debate elementary things because… we have come so much further in the discussions in the separatist and collectivist spaces, but when I end up in SVT [Swedish public broadcasting company] I'm not in the separatist space anymore and everything is much more inert (…) I think we are lacking an analysis about the fact that even though one would like to work in a collective way, it's not what is demanded by the big media houses, they are interested in creating individual profiles.

(Rachel, Sweden)

When measured against both precarity and complex work environments in mainstream media, the independent cultural work and alternative media sites are appealing. The scope of choosing topics and ways of expressing oneself is relatively broad, and many activists value the ethos of collective work. With the development of digital media technology, the establishment of media sites, video channels or podcasts has also become easy and inexpensive. It has opened possibilities for increasing autonomy and searching for audiences beyond the gate keeping systems of media houses.

For some activists, freelancing brings freedom and an ability to choose meaningful projects. They can do work for alternative media sites with lower payment levels or as voluntary work, since they also have well-paid professional work going on. Freelancing becomes a site of autonomy notably to actors who have already established a professional reputation and work within a field that

provides possibilities for commercial cultural production or for those who qualify for artist grants. Vincent considers his position favourable, since he is able to choose the projects he wants to join and affect the content of even work initiated by commercial actors.

> I've been lucky… I've been able to choose and even if I've sometimes been a bit hesitant about the direction of the project, I do raise the issue openly, and I don't consent to projects in which I don't believe. And when you can affect the ways that the work is done and what is made the focus, whatever it is… photos for some company or an advertisement campaign or similar… you can, there's quite a lot of freedom… in a way they choose the person to do the work… depending on what they can get out of it.
>
> *(Vincent, Finland)*

Mandy is another person who frames her work position in terms of autonomy and flexible conditions. She emphasises the freedom of working as a freelancer compared to those working in full-time positions. Despite their relatively stable working conditions, media and art institutions are not necessarily desirable workplaces for cultural workers racialised as non-white, due to their hierarchical structures and lack of antiracist practices.

> I'm in a lucky position, I have leeway… I can say these things aloud at my workplace or somewhere else, because I'm a freelancer. I don't have to start working somewhere, but not everybody has that option. Which also leads to many people being afraid to engage in this discussion or even open this door to themselves, because it can lead to big problems.
>
> *(Mandy, Finland)*

The interviews imply that in addition to the racialised hierarchies in the labour market that disadvantage racialised minorities while benefiting white majority people, access to secure working conditions and media influence in the context of racial capitalism is characterised by differentiation processes among those racialised as 'others.' Gargi Bhattacharyya (2018, p. 110) argues that in racial capitalism precarity is "the backdrop that places workers in imagined competition without end, in the process encouraging the deployment of any and every racialised defence available in the struggle to retain some remnant of security at work." In this struggle, however, post-ethnic activists who move between activism, freelancing and employment are not 'neoliberal subjects' (Scharff et al., 2016; Scharff, 2018) who internalise the imperative of self-transformation and self-management to fit into the individualising and entrepreneurial ethos. My analysis shows that the activists reflect on, critically address, search for the limits of how to bend rules and conventions, opt out of exploitative and racialising work environments, develop better working conditions through freelancing and independent platforms and value collectivity instead of individualism.

Marketing difference and navigating neoliberal rationalities

Even activists who do not seek work options within mainstream media are targeted by its individualising and commercialising logic. Especially young non-white women who voice cultural criticism and are thought to bring fresh perspectives to public discussions are interesting to some parts of mainstream media. They are seen to embody diversity and social change (McRobbie, 2009; Pitcher, 2012), as well as envisioned to break with the victimised image of 'immigrant women' (Razack, 2004; Mulinari, 2021). The tendency of racial capitalism to commodify difference and increasingly derive value from gendered and racialised diversity (Bhattacharyya, 2018, pp. 158–160) can make even critical actors attractive for media and commercial circulation – at least as long as they can be included in the image of 'good diversity' compatible with liberal values. As Gavan Titley (2019a, p. 45) argues, racialising processes in multicultural societies often operate "by sifting and ordering acceptable and unacceptable forms of diversity," instead of completely excluding diversity.

Media visibility requires going public with one's own name and playing along at least to some extent with the individualising media logic. Sara, who first posted on social media with a pseudonym, received many contacts from journalists in large media houses and was asked to be interviewed with her own name. Persuaded by chances to find larger platforms from which to present her critical commentaries, Sara decided to let go of anonymity. She recalls her ambiguity in relation to the personalisation of the news stories and her worry of being targeted by racist hate campaigns; nevertheless, she decided that gaining a speaker position in the public sphere was more important. By the time Sara submitted a commentary to an ongoing debate on racism in the public sphere, her name had already caught the attention of media houses and large audiences.

> The debate article was hugely circulated. That's when I thought I can use it. If the debate had taken place earlier, I would have just sat there with a good argument and written a super great text but nobody would have published it. Because who am I, a 23-year-old young woman from Stockholm. So in a way my social media activities legitimated my place in the public sphere.
>
> (Sara, Sweden)

Media personalities and naming is needed for the marketing of difference that media houses engage in. Media outlets are interested in individual stories, which means that activists who insist on being anonymous or strictly act as a collective are not very attractive to mainstream media. Collective ways of working do not fit well into the representations of acceptable diversity either. Safia, who has worked for several years in different activist and artist collectivities, has given many interviews to women's magazines and news media, as well as participated in debate programmes on commercial radio channels and public broadcasting. Although she usually presents herself as working together with other activists and artists, she has noticed that the interviews and media stories constantly present her as an individualised actor. The focus on creating personalised narratives excludes facts that do not fit into the images of 'good diversity.'

I don't see myself as an individual actor, I don't think I've ever been an individual actor, since I've always had some kind of collective to work with. And it's also interesting that in those media stories I've so many times mentioned these same names [of other activists] that I mentioned to you, but they never end up in the articles. Afterwards I've understood that this is because they want to focus on the person, so there is never space for even one of the names I've mentioned.

(Safia, Finland)

Collectivism can become part of narratives of 'bad diversity,' notably when connected to Muslim actors and groups. In such representations, collectivity becomes a sign of danger, extremism and lack of individual thought (Kalra and Mehmood, 2013; Kundnani, 2014). Media narratives of dangerous collectivism are especially pronounced in Denmark, where oppression of women, religious extremism and terrorism are all linked to the perceived 'collective cultures' of Muslim migrants (Andreassen, 2011; Nielsen, 2014). The previously discussed media debates about identity politics and 'angry activists,' with reference to the Rummet collective and other postethnic activists, also show how definitions of 'good' and 'bad diversity' are constantly shifting and marked by struggles. The 'good diversity' of young activists, who bring fresh voices to cultural and political critique, easily gives way to the 'bad diversity' of identity politics and polarisation. Postethnic activists are accused of re-evoking race talk, equalled with the extremism of the far right and claimed to enact linguistic policing (Aronsson, 2020, pp. 132–147).

Independent media sites and social media platforms also work within a context of commercial media practices and the commodification of difference. Many social media influencers receive offers from commercial actors to include advertisements or product placement on their websites and other platforms. This source of funding would allow the activists to cut down on their other, paid work and receive compensation for their voluntary work. However, many activists are critical of getting involved with commercial actors and do not find mixing activism with consumer culture suitable. They are worried about the loss of independence and unintended internalisation of market logic. Julia, who has so far not agreed to commercial cooperation, nevertheless sees benefits in such economic collaborations, if the companies somehow reflect the ideology of their social media platform. These could be, for example, companies established by racialised minority actors or organisations working to promote intersectional feminism.

It's a bit sensitive, the question of advertisements and being an activist. I don't know. At the same time we need to get paid. In the current situation, we have received some offers but we have been very clear about it: we don't want to do this. (…) If we received a serious offer we could of course think about it. But it would need to be like, we can't change the whole [platform] idea for a company that sells headphones or something.

(Julia, Sweden)

Some activists and media site organisers see commercial cooperation and consumer culture as a natural part of cultural work. For them, finding supporters from companies and individuals sympathetic to the mission of the media site or platform is a way to manage the economic pressures created by the activities. Lucas sees several other and even more important reasons to cooperate with advertisers and develop commercial products for the independent media site he is working with. He emphasises the urban culture and style creation of young adults, into which specific trademarks and supportive political statements fit well. Showing one's belonging to a subculture or community through clothes and other products is often connected to African-American popular culture, which inspires some activists and racialised minority cultural workers. Branding and development of spin-off merchandise is a common practice in commercial contexts and Lucas finds them well suited to the audiences of the media site.

> It felt natural, because we are in this environment of young urban adults and of course we want you to be able to support us if you want. We can have a t-shirt or hoodie or something (…) I have this commercial background, so I see it as important for the brand, that people who support us can have a hoodie, rather than for example a reflector, if you understand what I mean with the difference between the two.
>
> *(Lucas, Finland)*

Moreover, Lucas makes a point of funding as a prerequisite of decent working conditions and payment for the content producers of the media site. He argues that the intention is not to create profit for the owners of the media site, but to compensate for the work writers, photographers and other media producers do, as well as to increase the professionalism of the site. Marketing difference, thus, becomes a condition for producing alternative representations and moving away from voluntary work.

> Pretty soon we understood that we need to have advertisement incomes to keep the production of the media site going, in order to get the activities running, and we need to show some figures to the advertisers.
>
> *(Lucas, Finland)*

Navigating between the imperatives of racial capitalism and commodification of difference is not an easy task, since market interests are difficult to anticipate and radical aims of social change are often at odds with commercial goals.

Several activists strongly argue against commercial cooperation and embracing consumer culture in racialised minority media practices and platforms. They find the uncritical acceptance of commercialisation as a reproduction of capitalist exploitation, which they do not want to promote through their work. These activists also argue that not all racialised minority people are interested, or economically equipped, to participate in the latest trends of consumer culture, even if branded in Black culture or feminist body activism. One of them is Kim, who locates a critical stance on capitalism in a global frame:

> I am very critical towards capitalism and I think it by necessity oppresses certain groups of people. It's very elitist if we have activities for racialised minorities that do not take this into account at all. Because most Brown and Black people in the world are part of the groups that suffer most of it. (…) I think it's actually good that they've named it lifestyle media. It's more honest, because it's about consumption and this kind of thing, even the naming then refers to it. And it means it's for people who are able to consume or dream about being able consume.
>
> *(Kim, Finland)*

The Swedish writer-activist Valerie Kyeyune Backström, who was part of the Rummet collective, has critically addressed what she sees as an increasing tendency to market feminism and antiracism for the purposes of commercial uses. She lists public feminist persons who have earlier presented themselves as left-wing actors but are now using that 'brand' to support advertising and cooperation with large companies. Among the feminists she gives as examples are both white and non-white public profiles. Backström questions the radicality of feminism and antiracism that reproduces commercial ideologies and adjusts to neoliberal processes of individualisation and privatisation. She also draws attention to the politics of shaming that directs the focus onto certain persons and their moral standards, which is part of the neoliberal postracial discourse (Goldberg, 2009).

> It feels like times have changed so quickly. Earlier people revolted because they wanted to change things. Today people revolt because you need a radical profile to get a company to phone and ask you to sell products for them. You are attractive exactly as a left-wing feminist and antiracist – they can reach totally new target groups! (…) Criticism is forbidden: the market has made us all into individuals and if you want to problematise you shame somebody. During the 2010s the slogan "the private is political" has mutated into a monster, where everything is private and nothing can be questioned: we can just talk about products, our ideology is what products we buy.
>
> *(Backström, 2019)*

Such dilemmas have also been the focus of discussion events and seminars, such as the panel discussion "The weird alliance between capitalism and feminism" that took place in Vantaa in the Capital Area in Finland in June 2018. The panel gathered activists and cultural workers, racialised as non-white and white, to discuss questions related to the combination of capitalism and feminism in activism and cultural work. The event was initiated by activist and cultural worker Carmen Baltzar and moderated by writer-activist Aurora Lemma. The panelists engaged in conversation, from different perspectives, on the commercialisation of feminism and its implications for intersectional political agendas, as well as the possibilities of politics that would be based on anti-capitalism, antiracism and feminism. The event is one example of the rising interest in sharing thoughts and discussing antiracist

feminist politics from the perspective of neoliberal capitalism and the impact of commercialisation on activism and media practices.

The neoliberal logic and commodification of difference are, thus, part of the context in which postethnic activism and cultural work take place. These topics are discussed among the activists and cultural workers from diverse perspectives and sometimes disputed. As concluded by the Finnish discussion panel on capitalism and feminism, it is difficult to dismiss neoliberal capitalism and commercialisation as they are the social context within which we live. The dilemma of the media sites to build their activities on voluntary or paid work is not an easy one. Excessive voluntary work can lead to the exhaustion of the activists or result in the reduction of activities and media content, which may undermine the radical potential of activism in the long run. Nevertheless, critical analyses and discussions of strategies for social change are needed to prevent social movements from turning into conservative agents that merely seek to lift up one group in the economic and social hierarchies of racial capitalism. In order to understand the appeal of consumer culture and the difficulties of ignoring its relevance even in the context of alternative cultural production it may also be worth remembering Gargi Bhattacharyya's (2018, p. 172) words on how "the culture of consumer capitalism has operated as a compensation for the dehumanisation of capitalism." The promises of consumer culture are many and they may even be particularly appealing to groups that have been denied belongingness, stable economic positions and inclusion into humanity by the existing racial order.

Conclusions

This chapter has analysed how the activists seek to change representations of their communities and racialised minority subjects, as well as to challenge white normativity through media communication and cultural work. The scope and possibilities for such activities has broadened extensively with the development of digital media, which allows the activists to create closed groups on social media, produce podcasts, distribute videos and create media sites 'by and for' those racialised as 'others.' The media platforms function both as supportive spaces for shared discussions within racialised minority communities and as 'counterpublics' that develop social media campaigns and influence mainstream media through the hybrid media space. In these forms of activism, the individualising logic of social media and the entrepreneurialism of neoliberal capitalism are not very strong. Instead, the activists use the tools of digital media for collective community building and political mobilisation in creative ways.

Many activists work with arts, journalism and other cultural work, combining activism with professional work. For some, activism has become a stepping-stone for contributions and work in mainstream newspapers, magazines and public broadcasting. This chapter has examined how the activists navigate the terrain of cultural work, where they are both invited in as 'exciting radical young persons' but also subjected to the racialised, classed and gendered power relations of the cultural sector. Neoliberalisation has brought forth a call for civil society actors, such as

political subjects seen to embody diversity, in the public sphere (Duggan, 2003). This is especially true for young and educated racialised minority women who have become symbols of diversity and social change (McRobbie, 2009). Some activist-cultural workers find career opportunities through working on topics related to antiracism or intersectional feminism, but the analysis has also shown the precarious conditions and flexibility demands that characterise the cultural sector under neo-liberal capitalism. The tendency of racial capitalism to differentialise and hierarchicise both along the divisions of white/non-white and among those racialised as 'others' opens up career paths and promises of success for a few, while the rest continue to struggle in racialised precarity and economic insecurity.

Many cultural worker-activists have dealt with these dilemmas through developing their own media sites or platforms that produce podcasts, videos and other cultural products. This means that they have also been confronted with questions of funding, commercialism and consumer culture. The chapter has investigated the different ways of responding to such pressures. Some activist-cultural workers embrace consumer culture and seek to brand antiracism and racialised minority culture. Others are highly critical towards such tendencies in racialised minority activism and cultural production. This variety of perspectives has led to ongoing (self-)critical discussions among notably antiracist feminists, who have sought to address the controversies of neoliberal capit-alism and the choices between participation in or aims to overthrow it.

In order to design strategies to tackle the racialised, classed and gendered inequalities that shape the lives of all racialised minority people, critical discussion about the dividing logics of racial capitalism are needed. A focus on small groups of well-edu-cated middle class actors may instead feed into the differentialising processes of racial capitalism. Keeanga-Yamahtta Taylor (2016) argues that the political conditions from which the Black Lives Matter movement emerged in the US are characterised by a division between a Black economic, political and cultural elite and a Black majority that lives in economic insecurity and poverty. In the public sphere, the relatively small number of African-Americans who have fought their way to power and wealth are upheld as examples of a 'postracial' era, in which race no longer matters and economic achievement is dependent on personal qualities. She argues that members of the Black elite have adopted the ideology of personal responsibility and contributed to discourses that locate problems caused by economic and social oppression in Black communities themselves. The postethnic activists in my study have not adopted such neoliberal discourses, but the analysis shows that similar dividing logics of racial capitalism and pressures to entrepreneurialism are present in the media and cultural work sphere. The continuing and deepening of the political discussions that the Nordic antiracist fem-inists have started is, thus, central for the future of activism.

Notes

1 www.kontextpress.se/om-oss (accessed 27 July 2021)
2 www.ruskeattytot.fi/meista (accessed 29 July 2021)
3 https://marronage.dk/ (accessed 29 July 2021)

7

PENAL WELFARE STATE, NEOLIBERAL POLICIES AND THE INSURGENCE OF THE SUBURB

Introduction

Urban postethnic activism has developed for the most part in the marginalised suburbs of large cities, in which the racialised and classed structural inequalities shape living conditions. Many of the residents in the suburbs have a family background in former European colonies in Africa, the Middle East and Latin America. The suburbs largely consist of rental housing estates; have a high unemployment rate and low income level; and many families live in cramped conditions. In Swedish official policies, these suburbs are called 'spaces of outsidership' (*utanförskapsområden*) (Schierup et al., 2021), while Danish policies and media discourses address the areas as 'ghettos' – a term that replaced the earlier policy term 'socially vulnerable housing areas' in 2010 (Simonsen, 2016). In Finland, where racialised segregation is less pronounced and city planning has aimed to create residential areas with a mix of rental housing and home ownership, the discussion is framed around 'ethnic and socio-economic segregation.' Urban postethnic activism has developed especially in Sweden and to some extent in Denmark, while being less pronounced in Finnish cities. In this chapter, I examine how urban activism manifests in both political and cultural forms and how it articulates politics that aims to tackle racialised, classed and gendered power relations in today's Nordic societies.

The logic of racial capitalism to differentiate rather than to homogenise divides populations into workers, potential workers, occasional workers and non-workers with racialised characteristics (Bhattacharyya, 2018). Building on theoretical discussions of primitive accumulation, accumulation by dispossession and the postcolonial wasteland, Gargi Bhattacharyya argues that the designation of some spaces and populations as non-productive while other spaces and populations are deemed productive and central for capitalist accumulation is not only characteristic of the Global South. Even in the Global North,

> unemployment and underemployment are permanent features of the segmented global city and are borne disproportionately by racially subordinated groups. Despite various and variously insulting attempts to address culture, aspiration and training, it is apparent that capitalism in urban settings works to constantly recreate these divisions among the workforce, so that temporary entry for any particular group only intensifies exclusion for another.
>
> *(Bhattacharyya, 2018, p. 15)*

A spatialisation of similar racialised and classed processes takes place also in the studied Nordic countries, creating urban 'badlands' (Dikeç, 2007) that are the objects of racialising political debates, urban and criminal policies, and stigmatising media coverage.

The concept 'urban relegation' (Wacquant, 2016) draws attention to the active process of marginalising certain urban areas and consigning groups to live in them. Rather than focusing on the residents or the characteristics of the neighbourhoods, researchers need to examine the "multilevel structural processes, whereby persons are selected, thrust and maintained in marginal positions" (Wacquant, 2016, p. 1078). In the context of neoliberal policies, the urban areas defined as 'badlands' are marked by a public neglect and lack of active measures to tackle the structural problems of racialised precarity and deficiency of affordable housing. Scholars have examined the transformation of the state in the neoliberal era, arguing that the neoliberal condition involves a shift from the paternalistic caretaker state to a state focused on law and order politics (Goldberg, 2009; Wacquant, 2009). Moreover, Nordic researchers who have investigated the shift from welfare to workfare have showed how labour market activation programmes increasingly define state unemployment measures and emphasise the individual responsibility of the unemployed (Schierup et al., 2006; Kananen, 2012; Haikkola, 2019). Rising economic inequalities, privatisation of health and welfare services, and austerity politics have been combined with a political fixation on questions of immigration, crime and security (Ålund et al., 2017; Keskinen et al., 2019).

Wacquant's (2009) discussion of the 'penal state' is especially interesting here. He argues that the penal turn under neoliberalism is not so much a reflection of the insecurity over rising criminality but of the social insecurity following from precarious labour conditions and changing racial relations. By stating this, Wacquant seems to echo the theorisation by Stuart Hall and his colleagues who, in *Policing the Crisis* (Hall et al., 1978), argue that a crime focus in politics and the media articulates an ongoing economic crisis with racialised fears. Wacquant argues that the emphasis on law and order politics creates an impression of order and authority of the state at a time when its economic power has been eroded through neoliberal policies. Law and order politics also demarcate between the law-abiding citizens and the racialised 'others' located at the margins of the society. Thus, the political elites can create an illusion of control and effectivity by concentrating on demands towards marginalised groups, without addressing the underlying causes of racialised precarity and socio-economic inequalities.

Although Wacquant's discussion of the 'penal state' mainly draws upon the development of the neoliberal state in the US, with its mass incarceration project and combination of 'restrictive workfare' and 'expansive prisonfare,' he also shortly addresses the 'European road' to the penal state. The two main features distinguishing the European penal state from that of the US are (1) its combination of welfare and justice policies, and (2) relying on policing rather than the prison in the penalisation of precarity (Wacquant, 2009, p. 24). Further developing these thoughts, Mustafa Dikeç (2007) examines the French state as the 'republican penal state,' with an emphasis on its political traditions of strong state and secularism. He identifies the discourse of the republican state under threat by divisive cultural differences and communitarianism as a central facet of the French penal state, as well as its interventions into the marginalised urban areas through urban policy and new forms of policing. In the Nordic context, I argue that we can speak about the 'penal welfare state,' which builds on the political traditions of the welfare state and racial nordicisation (see Chapter 2), as well as being characterised by an increasing penalisation of racialised precarity. The 'penal welfare state' is a visible trait of Danish and Swedish governing, while somewhat less characteristic (or in the process of developing) in Finland. The 'penal welfare state' has resulted in a growing focus on crime, policing and penal policies, targeting especially young racialised minority men and urban areas marked by racial and class disadvantage. At the same time, it also makes use of the 'soft side' of welfare policies and community work to scrutinise and responsibilise racialised minority families and communities (Dahlstedt, 2019; Schclarek-Mulinari and Keskinen, 2020; Fallov and Birk, 2021).

The language of militarisation has also entered Nordic public discussions of the marginalised and racialised neighbourhoods. Writing about the Swedish case, Suruchi Thapar-Björkert, Irene Molina and Karina Raña (2019, p. 142) argue that "the suburban landscape is steadily being shaped through a shift in political discourse – from welfare to warfare – leading to a steady militarisation of the suburbs." They locate this discursive shift in public discussions featuring suburbs as 'parallel societies' with their own social orders and failed citizenship; the increase of policing practices involving racial profiling and identity controls; anti-terrorism policies; and the tightening of immigration regulations. Politicians have also demanded the use of the army to tackle criminal gangs in the marginalised suburbs or to take over tasks from the police to enable their focus on organised crime.

Nevertheless, the marginalised urban areas are sites for lively civil society organising, consisting both of the 'older' generation of ethnic and migrant organisations, and the 'new' generation of postethnic activism. Some of the activities are designed predominantly for and organised by the young activist generation, whereas other activities build on broad local alliances with other civil society actors. Politics and culture are at the core of urban postethnic activism and some of the activities combine both, when seeking to articulate views from residential areas that are usually the objects rather than the subjects of public speech.

Stigmatising media images and culture from the margins

Among the activists, there is widespread acknowledgement of the 'territorial stigmatisation' (Wacquant, 2008) of the marginalised urban areas, to which media images significantly contribute. The news stories published about the suburbs and their residents do not match the experiences and interpretations of those living in the neighbourhoods. Mainstream media's extensive focus on social problems, criminality and cultural 'otherness' of the marginalised suburbs is confirmed by research (Ericsson et al., 2000; Backvall, 2019; Frandsen and Hansen, 2020) and is even shown to feed into the tropes of transnational far right media circulation (Titley, 2019b).

The dissatisfaction with stigmatising media content and its skewed images has led to the establishment of locally based media initiatives and organisations that aim to broaden the scope of the stories told about the suburbs. One of the first urban postethnic groups in Sweden was Megafonen (The Megaphone), which started its activities in the Stockholm suburb Husby. Its aim was to challenge the stigmatising media images and the exclusion of residents' perspectives from urban planning (Schierup et al., 2014; Sernhede et al., 2019, pp. 105–107). Megafonen became an important voice for young people in the locality, but it also broke through to the mainstream media when the urban uprisings spread in several Swedish cities in the summer of 2013. Megafonen sought to bring questions of structural disadvantage to the public discussions about the uprisings, but was confronted with harsh criticism and demands to condemn the rioters' behaviour in order to appear as a legitimate discussion partner (de los Reyes et al., 2014).

Further groups have developed out of the need to better represent the urban neighbourhoods and the living environments in which the activists grew up. The activists have sought to shift the power balance in the society by defining the stories from the margins, instead of relying on news media with little contact and interest in the everyday lives of the suburbs. The organisation Orten i fokus (The area in focus) established its own website and organised cultural activities in Bot-kyrka, in the southern suburbs of the Greater Stockholm area. The word 'orten,' which translates to 'the area,' is often used in Swedish urban activism to refer to the marginalised and racialised suburbs (see Chapter 4).

> Areas that are all the time talked about, debated about, discussed about. Erroneous images, information characterised by prejudices and stereotypical formulations. A sense that has been spread through media and exaggerated and aggravated every year... In order to take away the false image we decided to start Orten i fokus. We will now take back our history and narrate it in a new way. We do not want to be viewed as self-pitying victims but for what we are; a diverse place with many different people, backgrounds and competences. Hold onto your hats, because the area is much more positive, inspiring and full of love than you think.
>
> *(Palma et al., 2014)*

Victor, who was active in Orten i fokus, connects the beginning of the urban media activities and the need to expand the analyses created in the marginalised suburbs to the urban uprisings in Swedish cities in 2013. According to him, the media coverage of the uprisings and its emphasis on illegality and violence at the cost of structural explanations made it evident that new platforms and perspectives were needed. The fact that the only actor seeking to bring nuance to the public discussion on the uprisings and to argue for an understanding based on socio-economic inequalities, Megafonen, was harshly attacked in mainstream media strengthened the conviction that more critical urban voices were needed. Orten i fokus published a magazine in which local activists and writers discussed culture from the perspective of those living in the suburbs. The magazine was distributed locally in Botkyrka, but also sent out to art institutions in central Stockholm and a few suburbs in other Swedish cities. Moreover, the group members organised an art exhibition and local youth café activities.

Another local media initiative was established as a collaboration between the antiracist feminist organisation StreetGäris and Tensta konsthall, a municipal art institution located in one of the Stockholm suburbs. The two-year project Nyhetsbyrån (News agency) educated young people in the western suburbs of Stockholm to create their own media content and to work with culture. When the project was finished, the young people continued as a network that connected writers, photographers, activists, poets and event organisers from the suburbs to support each other. The collaboration was initiated to provide young people with skills in journalistic practices so that they could contribute to the broadening of representations of the suburbs, but also to learn creative tools to tell their stories and find support in pursuing careers within arts and culture.

However, for many activists in local urban groups, engaging with culture is not only, or even predominantly, about media images about the suburbs. Culture and art are important as forms of self-expression and as connecting points between people. Bahar, who was active in another local organisation in Botkyrka, emphasised that several kinds of activities were important in postethnic activism. Her group organised a study circle to grapple with questions of racism and intersectionality theoretically, as well as a book circle to share thoughts on fiction. They also arranged spoken word evenings, in which invited poets performed and an open mic at the end of the evening allowed newcomers to take the floor. In the event I participated in, many of the poets were teenagers or in their early 20s, performing spoken word to friends, acquaintances and people from the neighbourhood. Bahar explains that both political discussions and cultural performances are needed, as they provide the possibility to share different parts of one's personality. She points out that the activists are not only persons who experience racism and other structural disadvantages, but have multiple interests:

> For us, it's very much about recognising that all these people who come to the study circle are people with different kinds of lives and interests and so forth. Unfortunately a person who is racialised [as 'other'] nearly always has to deal with questions of how to survive in this society, how to deal with racism. So

sadly all our interests, knowledge and other things that don't have to do with racism fade away, for example interest in arts or music. This has been a forum for making that part of ourselves visible, so that we don't just share knowledge about the structures but can also say: I can do arts and I want to show my art here. Or: I can do this, I would like to start a group in which we can meet and play the guitar together, for example.

(Bahar, Sweden)

Culture is a way to speak about structural oppression and painful experiences without addressing them in detail or using other means of taking control of the narrative, so that the experiences become endurable. Esme, who was both an activist and cultural worker, found creating exhibitions and doing art as an extension of politics – art can take over at the point in which no adequate words exist or when political speech becomes unbearable:

Art is an expression of all this political at the point when there are no words. A lot of it is about how dreadfully tough it is to talk about these things using words.

(Esme, Sweden)

There is, however, a structural unbalance in the presence and positions of differently racialised and classed groups in the cultural sector. The students in art education and staff in art institutions consist of largely white majority people with middle class background, while persons racialised as non-white or living in the marginalised suburbs are highly underrepresented in these institutions. Many of the activists comment on the effects of this racial and class skewedness for the question of who can think of oneself as an artist in a society that is built on white normativity and racial nordicisation (see Chapter 2). The official discourses may present the Nordic countries as the cradle of equality and providing the same opportunities for all its citizens, but entering the cultural and artistic sphere is in many ways challenging for a racialised minority person who comes from the suburbs. Victor grew up in the marginalised suburbs and later studied art at university. He points out the difficulty of naming oneself as a poet, due to the exclusionary notions connected to it:

It is a problem that young people in the marginalised suburbs who write poetry don't call themselves poets, or those who do arts don't call themselves artists. And they are not called that by the society either. (…) I don't want to call myself that either. It was only after I got the education and did other cultural things that I started thinking: aha, maybe I am a poet after all [laughs].

(Victor, Sweden)

Spoken word and culture as a way for local organising

Spoken word poetry has been an important cultural form for self-expression but also for the mobilisation of young people in the marginalised and racialised suburbs.

The performance events and nationwide contests organised by young activists have opened spaces for talented poets, who articulate experiences and thoughts from their own lives to which other young racialised minority persons can relate. Spoken word poetry is a channel to make visible structural racism and class inequalities, but using the power of commenting and framing in creative ways. Performed in front of audiences, the events and contests also involve community building and a strengthening of the local actors.

The organisation Förenade Förorter (United Suburbs) started as an arranger of poetry contests in the marginalised Stockholm suburbs in 2015. In the following years, it has developed into a broad cultural organisation with a firm basis in the western suburbs of Stockholm but a national range of activities. Förenade Förorter believes in culture as a powerful means of creating social change in the conditions of urban marginality.

> Förenade Förorter is our way to start collecting our experiences as part of our representation of the society – we take the power to interpret and formulate our own narrative. One way to do that is to start telling a story. Use one's own voice, reach out with one's story, express oneself on the scene, record a song, create a theatre play, write a film manuscript or publish an anthology – and in this way create a space for art and creativity. We are convinced that culture and art have most strength and are most expressive in areas and places where the social stratification is most visible and where oppression and repression can take its worst forms. Such as in our suburbs.
>
> *(Förenade Förorter, 2021)*

Förenade Förorter organised a series of yearly spoken word poetry competitions in the marginalised suburbs between 2015 and 2018, with up to 12 local competitions in ten Swedish cities and a national final. In the beginning, they experimented with how grass roots organising of a cultural event would work and how actors in different localities would find it worth engaging with. As Nadine explains, the aim was to strengthen organising in the marginalised suburbs, and poetry slams were a way to achieve this. If it had not found resonance among the local event organisers in the other suburbs, the ideas might have needed rethinking.

> It was important for us that we didn't for example start with the activities and then afterwards fill in with the people, because that's how things often take place in organisations. You start with something, start with an idea and then try to channel in the people in this and try to make them believe in the idea and so forth. Instead, we wanted to work from the grass roots, start from below and not from the top down. So the first year was actually a pilot project in order to check whether our sense that this could work, whether our sense that this could create trust, whether all those things were actually taking place.
>
> *(Nadine, Sweden)*

The interest in the activities proved to be broad and the competitions grew every year with new local organisers turning up as volunteers. Part of the resonance of the poetry contests could be related to the already existing suburban youth culture, where hip-hop was popular and its "battle" tradition well-rehearsed. Nadine views the strengthening of the culture created in the suburbs and the building of respect towards the language used, embodied experiences and stories told in the marginalised neighbourhoods as an important task. I interpret this as a reflection on the effects of territorial stigmatisation to which the production of culture can act as a counterforce and resource for social change.

> with the help of many different stories performed on the scene with different kinds of language, different kinds of descriptions, you can see that it broadens the general view of what a person living in the suburbs is. But it also helps to strengthen the culture in the suburbs.
>
> *(Nadine, Sweden)*

The poetry performances mobilised broad groups of young people in the suburbs both as local event organisers, performing poets and audience members. The quality of the poetry was also recognised outside the marginalised suburbs. In 2015, both the individual and the group championship in the national Poetry Slam competition went to poets representing Förenade Förorter. The suburban poetry competitions were also granted a prize by the City of Stockholm in 2017 and mainstream media became interested in the large cultural events organised in the suburbs, portraying them in their news and cultural sections. Nevertheless, the funding support for the impressive and popular events was relatively meagre, and at times crowdfunding was needed to cover up for the costs of the arrangements (Sernhede et al., 2019, p. 194).

In the spoken word contests, I listened to the poets address questions of racism, marginalisation and mental health, but they also reflected on friendship, dreams and a sense of belonging to the marginalised neighbourhoods. Moreover, the young poets touched upon issues taking place within the suburbs, such as shootings and lethal violence, as well as racism and sexism among racialised minority communities. The contests provided space for multiple stories to arise from the everyday lives of the suburbs, as the organisers had aimed for, and found large audiences. In the competitions, the audience were very into and supported the performances by clicking their fingers in the parts they found especially impressive.

After the poetry contests, Förenade Förorter has worked together with other local civil society organisations in the western suburbs of Stockholm to arrange training for young people in poetry, writing and cultural arrangements. The organisation has also taken the initiative to establish a national youth organisation that will connect and strengthen the work of local groups in the Swedish suburbs. Its strategy has all along been to strengthen local actors in grass roots organising and mobilise young people to change their living environments. The collaborative project Rinkeby Kulturarena (Rinkeby Cultural Arena) trained young people in

cultural production and organising, which resulted in the event Suburb Gala in 2019 to celebrate local cultural talent. In 2020, Förenade Förorter arranged a new competition – this time for the best writer in the suburbs. The competition included two categories, one for fiction and one for screenplay. With its capacity for broad mobilising and locus of inspiration for new grass roots initiatives in the suburbs both locally and nationally, Förenade Förorter is without doubt one of the most influential groups of postethnic activism.

Regarding the relationship between the individual and the collective, Nadine explains that the approach by Förenade Förorter is about promoting the collective. However, the collective consists of many stories and voices that create more of a multitude of views than one unified perspective. Strengthening the collective means dealing with the different views and actors in ways that enable working together for social change.

> We are an organisation that wants to promote the collective but the collective is also a group with many different individual stories (…) so I wouldn't say that we have a collective voice, I think. Rather that we have, we are a collective where everyone should be taken into account.
>
> *(Nadine, Sweden)*

Building democracy from the grass roots

Förenade Förorter is an example of the strength of local organising, but also of a strategy for mobilising the marginalised suburbs across localities. Organising the residents in the marginalised suburbs and strengthening democracy from the grass roots is also the aim of many other postethnic activists and local organisations. The urban activist groups have taken up several topics with local resonance and mobilised young people in their neighbourhoods, sometimes also developing larger campaigns and coalitional work to change the living conditions in the suburbs.

The housing situation, with rising rents and neoliberal urban policies, has been an important motivator for urban mobilising. The campaign "Alby är inte till salu" (Alby is not for sale) in the southern suburbs of the Greater Stockholm area in 2013 was a reaction to the municipality's aim to sell a large number of its housing estates to private investors, which the activists and many residents feared would lead to a renovation boom and rapidly rising rents. The campaign managed to bring public attention to the housing issue and show urban activism to be a local force that authorities needed to take into account. Nevertheless, the struggle against the privatisation of the housing estates in Alby was lost and the activism subsided. Neoliberal urban policies were also the target of the section of Megafonen (Megaphone) located in the suburb Husby in the western part of Stockholm. The members criticised plans to 'uplift' the marginalised suburbs through rebuilding and economic development, interpreting these as gentrification processes that would harm the residents and pointing out that the changes were planned without consulting locals

(Sernhede et al., 2019, pp. 107–110). Megafonen also participated in the occupation of a meeting place for local organisations, Husbyträff, which the municipal authorities had decided to relocate, and connected this to the broader trend of closing down local welfare services and schools.

The branch of Megafonen located in the suburb Hässelby/Vällingby in western Stockholm, which later developed into Rådet av Enade Kreoler (Council of United Creoles), organised cultural events, football matches, driving lessons and other activities that the members thought were needed. Hawre, who was an active member, points out that the form of activity was not the most important. Instead, the group sought to counteract alienation, created by racial and class oppression, which required investigating their experiences and needs. The activities that were initiated as a result of this could vary and new activities would replace old ones.

> We have said that the organisation exists for us and we need to reflect about our own needs. Based on this we need to develop activities that fulfil our needs. And this approach doesn't create fixed activities. It can create whatever activities, as long as we follow this logic. (…) to be oppressed means that we live in humiliation. Which results in a distancing from ourselves, alienation. And when we distance from ourselves, we don't want to deal with our own needs and don't want to deal with ourselves. (…) We encourage people to talk about their own experiences, talk about their own needs. And what kind of activity comes out of that process is not so important, because we are in this to break the alienation, not to create activities.
>
> *(Hawre, Sweden)*

The group engaged in in-depth discussions of what racial and class oppression, and the alienation it caused, meant for individual persons racialised as non-white or 'others.' This led to the identification of the term 'creole' as a common denominator of those living in the racialised and marginalised suburbs, who spoke several languages and were located at the crossroads of many intersecting power relations (see Chapter 4). The importance of the idea of alienation and internalised racism that the group developed meant that their focus was on individual needs and efforts, but also on the societal context that created that alienation and the racial and class oppression experienced by 'creoles.'

> It is often misunderstood as some kind of neoliberal, individualistic way of thinking. It has nothing to do with that. We emphasise greatly ourselves: you as a person and your experiences are important, your will is important, your efforts and what you do can be important, what you feel is extremely important. We emphasise such questions very much. At the same time, our analysis says: okay but you are part of the society. The actual formulation goes something like this: you are a part of a bigger context and the bigger context – that is the society – affects who you are. So I don't know,

there's a kind of Marxist logic here. You are a part of the society but you are, well, it shapes you as you shape the society.

(Hawre, Sweden)

Hawre's discussion of the need to rethink the focus on individualism, detached from its neoliberal framing and centred on a Marxist-inspired analysis of the sociological roots of alienation, point towards the limits of current leftist analyses of racial and classed subjectivities. Interpretations that tend to collapse all references to the personal and individual needs into a neoliberal logic miss the complex operations of racial and classed power, as well as the points of resistance that these open up. Postethnic activists are discussing and theorising on these complexities, as well as developing movement practices to address the relationship between the individual and collective in new ways.

Furthermore, urban activism has targeted the lack of public measures to tackle violence and lethal shootings in the marginalised suburbs, as well as criticised the criminalising and militarising discourse on the suburbs. The organisation Förorten mot våld (Suburbs against violence) (see also Chapter 5) brought the views of local organisations and residents into the public discussions on urban violence. It argued that politicians need to focus on developing employment possibilities, housing conditions and schools in the marginalised suburbs in order for long-term solutions to work. The organisation was established after a shooting that killed two brothers in the Järva area in western Stockholm. Many residents felt that the killings had been going on for too long, while not much was done to prevent them. Instead, media and politicians stigmatised the victims as gang members and placed responsibility of the increasing violence on families and communities in the localities. A large network of local organisations, ranging from ethnic and religious organisations to youth and parent organisations, together with the newly established Förorten mot våld, called for a demonstration against violence in December 2016. The demonstration gathered a large number of participants and became the starting point of active local and national work against violence. Förorten mot våld also participated in the arrangement of the "Mothers' manifestation against lethal violence," a demonstration that took place in the centre of Stockholm in November 2018 on the initiative of a group of mothers who had lost their sons in the urban shootings. Moreover, the spokespersons of Förorten mot våld travelled to other Swedish cities to talk about their organisation, which inspired activities in several other suburbs.

The postethnic urban activism discussed in this chapter is largely organised by young people who went to school and lived their lives in the suburbs, but the activists cooperate and rely on other local organisations, as the previous examples show. Many of the suburbs I visited during the fieldwork have a long tradition of democratic organising, including ethnic and diasporic organisations, youth and parent organisations, women's organisations and other activities. These are not necessarily postethnic in their way of organising, but the young activists can find a common ground with them on pressing questions such as lethal violence or urban restructuration.

In western Stockholm, a yearly seminar titled "Democracy forum Järva" has gathered local activists and residents to discuss timely questions of social justice and

everyday lives in the suburbs since 2009. When I participated in the event in April 2016, several hundred people gathered to discuss media coverage of the suburbs, youth activities and schools, and shootings in the neighbourhoods. The programme included a panel discussion with local politicians and four teenage boys from the group Rinkebys framtid (Rinkeby's future). The boys presented their views about the closing down of the local leisure centre, issues with learning and schools with unqualified staff, and the cramped housing conditions in the neighbourhood, to which the politicians were asked to respond. In the discussion, the audience pointed out that the problems with municipal schools and high unemployment rates had been known for several years, yet not much change had taken place. The participants also wondered why some other schools in the area could provide much better educational results and use innovative methods to involve the parents in their children's schooling, while lessons from these high-achieving schools were not used to develop practices more broadly. The main part of the programme was organised and undertaken by adults, but some teenagers and children in their pre-teen years also provided their views during the event. A group of 12–13-year-old girls voiced their views of the need for football and basketball activities for girls that would be free of cost. When the politicians and representatives of local organisations referred to some existing initiatives, the girls insisted that activities should not cost anything, so that everybody in the neighbourhoods could join them. They had the courage to take the floor in front of a large audience and, with a few sentences, make visible the everyday realities and wishes of many children in the locality.

The previous examples witness a broad field of organising in the marginalised suburbs, largely ignored in public discussions of the areas. However, some activists point out that organising in conditions of racial and class inqualities, stigmatising media coverage and issues with criminality is not always easy. It is easier to reach out to young people who are politically interested and active in the civil society, whereas more marginalised youth in the suburbs may not respond to contacts or attend events in the same way. The grass roots work that many postethnic activists, but also other local organisations, do is very much about building networks and strengthening trust in collective organising on a long-term basis. These actors are engaged in shaping urban political organising that takes into account the interplay of race and class, since class politics in the Nordic region has largely ignored questions of race. As Stuart Hall (1980/2020) has pointed out, race is the modality in which class is lived out. This may mean that making distinctions between these two is not always relevant for those living under the oppressive conditions of racism. Ramla Abdullahi and Aisha Ali, who established the social media account Ortens Röster (Suburban Voices), capture well the dilemmas of building democracy from the grass roots in a society, where class inequalities have mainly been addressed as matters of the white working class and dominant left-wing politics has neglected the intersections of race and class:

> Class and segregation have been questions that the white working class and under class have talked about. Even non-white people who don't live in our Million programme areas can identify themselves as working class/under class. But those

living in the suburbs are affected by so many layers of racism and class contempt that one has to struggle for survival and focus more on racism and Islamophobia for example, so the class debate is left aside. Not because people here wouldn't be conscious about it, but because how we talk about class needs to be updated, reformulated and adapted to the current era.

(Atto, 2019)

Public–private partnerships and hopes of change

In contrast to many studies that merely focus on the racialising effects of neoliberal policies, 'racial eruptions,' David Roberts and Minelle Mahtani (2010, p. 254) argue for a perspective that treats "race as an organising principle of society that neoliberalism reinforces and modifies." The postethnic activists in the marginalised suburbs are working under neoliberal conditions not only in terms of urban gentrification, increasing surveillance and policing of racialised minorities, discussed above, but also in regards to the privatisation of public services and the proliferation of NGO-led projects in the welfare and employment sector. The shift from government to governance, i.e. from a bureaucratic state to governing through a combination of state and civil society actors, has resulted in various outsourcing and contracting arrangements and the development of public–private partnerships (Harvey, 2005, pp. 76–77; Bernal and Grewal, 2014; Scheuerman, 2018, p. 109). This has opened new space for civil society actors, often privileging large established NGOs but to some extent also benefiting grass roots organisations that are able to expand their activities with public funding.

In recent decades, the marginalised suburbs have been the target of a large number of projects seeking to promote integration, increase employability and create activities for youth. Postethnic urban activists view this as at best a futile and at worst a destructive trend, since it reproduces the problem image of the suburbs, and the project designers often lack an understanding of the local conditions. They bring in their predetermined views of improvement and means of working, while ignoring the knowledge of local residents and grass roots organisations. Many activists criticise the urban projects as initiatives of good intentioned people coming from the outside to 'save' the residents of the marginalised suburbs[1] and leaving when the project finishes, with no long-term impact on the neighbourhoods. Instead, the activists seek to work in ways that start from the perspectives of the residents in the neighbourhoods and value their competence. The grass roots organising is itself a means to strengthen local communities and the residents.

There's this top-down perspective – one comes from the outside and tells the residents what's best for them. This has very serious consequences. Partly you diminish the competence and the engagement that exists in the residential area, but you also think you know best. We want to give the possibility for the residents themselves to try to formulate and be part of the solutions, to

have influence on the processes that relate to their living conditions and living
environment. That often brings the best results.

(Mehry, Sweden)

In a manner resembling that of the postethnic activists in the media sphere, dis-
cussed in Chapter 6, several urban activists have found work in NGO-led projects in
the suburbs or developed their activities into funded projects. Activists who have
received funding for specific activities, in addition to the voluntary work their group
does, recognise that the interests of the funding bodies to some extent differ from their
own, but they still hold the power to determine the contents of the activities. Thus,
they are not usually very concerned about the risks of co-optation or pressure to adapt
to the views of the funding providers that some organisations face under neoliberal
conditions (e.g. Chakraborty, 2021). Instead, a few activists are concerned about the
reporting of activities and gaining continued funding, since they have followed their
own judgement of relevant activities rather than the original plans, based on which the
funding was granted. However, for those working in NGO-led projects in the suburbs
or with youth activities, the navigating of neoliberal structures and rationalities is a
more complex process that makes visible the intertwinement of the state and the
NGO sector but also the spaces of autonomy that the activists are able to carve out
within their work in the NGOs.

Scholarly discussions of NGOs under neoliberalism have largely been framed as
criticism towards the processes of 'NGOisation,' referring to the tendency for
professionalisation, institutionalisation, bureaucratisation and de-politicisation to
take precedence over activism, horizontal mobilisation and the creation of alter-
native political agendas (Lang, 2012; Choudhry and Kapoor, 2013; Gonzalez,
2021). Such analyses have indicated a shift from activism by people experiencing
racialised, classed and gendered oppression to professional work and advocacy in
the NGO sector, which rather than creating social change participates in neoliberal
governance. However, this 'NGOisation paradigm' has been criticised for creating
an ideal type of description of how radical social movements have undergone a
profound change turning into bureaucratic and de-politicised NGOs, although
such a clear-cut division into 'good movements' and 'bad NGOs' has never existed
(Hodzic, 2014). Instead of such a simplified dichotomy, Saida Hodzic (2014) argues
for a view of NGOs as hybrid formations and of organising as impure assemblages,
in which the form – be it NGO, social movement or coalitions – does not deter-
mine the content of politics. I find Hodzic's criticism valid and relevant for my
own analysis. A perspective of NGOs as impure and hybrid formations allows an
examination of them as both tied to neoliberal processes and as possible sites for
political projects that question neoliberal policies and rationalities. Instead of the
form of organising, the pursued politics is at the centre of such an analysis.

An example of an urban movement that has shifted towards 'NGOisation' in the
sense that it involves professionalisation and close cooperation with Malmö City is
Rörelsen gatans röst och ansikte (RGRA, The voice and face of the street move-
ment). The organisation was originally inspired by activism in Brazilian favelas and

has from its start worked with youth, music and other cultural production. RGRA has received funding for its activities from municipal and state sources, and at the time of my fieldwork a large part of its work was framed around employment options for racialised minority youth, in the form of trainee jobs and coaching positions. The aim was to provide young people with a risk of marginalisation, such as school dropouts and those with little or no work experience, to become responsible for organising events, applying project funding and running activities, such as the RGRA radio station and social media communication. Maria, who was employed at the organisation, explained that the issues of marginalisation and young people's situations are so demanding that voluntary work cannot create the required change. She found it important to give responsibility and learning experiences to young people that would help them find their place in the labour market and the society more broadly.

> I'm a bit critical towards volunteer work. This can be misunderstood, but I'll try to explain myself. Voluntary work was the starting point of RGRA but the way our society looks and what I would like RGRA to be is to create opportunities for young unemployed people to get jobs. Even if the wages weren't so high. (…) The result [of paid work] is that the person takes responsibility in another way: this is my job and I'm responsible for it. I think it's good to include voluntary work, but I don't think you can build an organisation or the organisation we want to be right now on voluntary work. We deal with questions and young people of which the society has no grip on. And I think the importance of our work should be made visible.
>
> (Maria, Sweden)

In Malmö, several other organisations work with young people, employment and social pedagogy in ways that combine social movement perspectives with institutionalised NGO work. Among those are the Hassela youth activities, which at the time of my fieldwork combined targeted activities to increase youth employment through training and coaching with the strengthening of self-respect and solidarity among the participants. Even in this case, it would be a mistake to interpret the emphasis on self-respect as adjusting to neoliberal rationalities, since its motivation was to counteract the effects of racism and stigmatisation. Despite the successful employment results, Benjamin who led the youth activities was critical towards the lack of structural change in the work methods. When the young people went out as trainees to schools or other workplaces, they encountered racism and territorial stigmatisation. The methods of the NGO sector were not designed to challenge such structures; instead, young people had developed collective ways to tackle issues of racism. The neoliberal structures that framed the NGO activities placed emphasis on employability and individual paths to working life. Nevertheless, the collectivist ethos of the Hassela work provided young people with resources that enabled them to create less institutionalised and professionalised activities, such as establishing a self-organised youth group.

> Our project is actually not about breaking the structures. It's not what we should do. We should see to it that young people get jobs. If we are honest about it, that's what our project is about. (…) but [because of racism] we don't send our coaches alone, we send them as a group, because they feel very vulnerable in these structures. (…) My task is to see that if one of our coaches for example is subjected to racism, then I go there and try to strengthen them, discuss the matter with the rector [at the school], what's happened and so forth. But that we would go into the schools and break the oppressive structures, we don't do that. We strengthen the individuals through the group. However, what has happened is that the young people themselves started a movement. Because they noticed that if we can unite in a youth organisation, we can maybe challenge the structures.
>
> *(Benjamin, Sweden)*

Young people's struggles in the racialised and marginalised suburbs are also focused on the state of the municipal schools, many of which do not guarantee teaching that would provide qualifications for further education. Both in Malmö and Stockholm, the urban events I attended and the activists I talked with pinpointed the malfunctioning of the schools as a central issue for marginalisation in the suburbs. When the municipal schools are unable to provide qualified teachers, or teachers at all, in all subjects, the students' possibilities to continue their studies are seriously hampered. Mehry, who worked in the Järva area in western Stockholm, also points out the lack of ambition and the atmosphere of giving up in many of the municipal schools. When the quality of the public services deteriorates, as a result of racialised stigmatisation and state withdrawal from responsibility, the private sector becomes the alternative – even for those who, like Mehry, ideologically favour public education. Some private schools in the suburbs have established strong cooperation with parents and provided their students with high-quality teaching, which has led to educational results that greatly exceed those of the municipal schools in the area. It is not difficult to see why Mehry sees more hope in these kinds of initiatives than in the municipal schools in which the quality of teaching had rapidly declined.[2]

> Ideologically I think the state should be responsible for education, I mean our municipal schools should provide young people with the right tools, to be the best schools. There should be resources in the socio-economically disadvantaged areas so that the students get the right education, based on their needs. But personally I'm tired of seeing all these young people drop. So I welcome private schools that are non-profit, I welcome higher ambitions from teachers and rectors and schools that want all their pupils to gain complete degrees. Because right now our system is not working. (…) we know already before the kids start school that nearly 60 % of the pupils in these schools are not going to make it. While schools in other residential areas have higher ambitions, they make a lot more effort.
>
> *(Mehry, Sweden)*

Because of the lack of investment in jobs, schools and other effective measures to tackle the hindrances young racialised minority people face in the marginalised suburbs, the state and municipal actors do not seem to be the actors that can bring hope of social change. Instead, Mehry places her hope in partnerships that NGOs, like the one she was working for, can build with private companies, academics and local schools. When the public sector is either withdrawing from the suburbs or intensifying the control aspect of its activities, the actors providing opportunities and future prospects for young people are rather the local housing estates and associations of public utility that create summer jobs and trainee positions for young people. Public–private partnerships are sites that at least seemingly open up space for local level influence and participation, when the state no longer appears to take responsibility for structural changes.

> We are developing a partnership model right now, in a dialogue with local actors, researchers, schools, civil society and private companies, trying to find a model where the work is developed from below and in which the citizens have influence on all levels of the work.
>
> (Mehry, Sweden)

Writing about the citizen-driven community organisation Folkets Husby (Husby of the People), located in the same Järva area in western Stockholm, Carl-Ulrik Schierup, Alexandra Ålund and Ilhan Kellecioglu (2021) highlight the difficulties that activists face when seeking to navigate between neoliberal governance and grass roots organising. Folkets Husby has developed a number of activities that mobilise young people, women and organisations in the locality, as well as running a community-based social centre. Nevertheless, navigating between the requirements of public funding for projects, collaboration with large established NGOs and municipal policies that frame the suburbs in terms of social problems is challenging. The aims of the funders and the organisers of the activities can be at odds, even resulting in control acts by the funding agencies when the community organisation is seen to promote too radical politics. Thus, Schierup, Ålund and Kellecioglu (2021) conclude that Folkets Husby is more inclined to foster active citizenship, in the neoliberal spirit, than spaces for radical activism.

Notwithstanding the difficulties of navigating the terrain of neoliberal governance, I argue that the aim of many urban activists to strengthen civil society organising in the marginalised neighbourhoods should not be interpreted as complicity in fostering neoliberal citizenship. Rather, it is based on the aim of strengthening democracy in the marginalised suburbs from below and thus a necessary building block of radical politics. It would also be a mistake to ignore the possibilities of organising residents in the marginalised suburbs and creating grass roots politics through the collaboration of postethnic activists with, or through their work within, the NGO sector. My study shows that those working in the NGO sector are, at least sometimes and in suitable conditions, able to carve out spaces of autonomy that allow them to work to strengthen democratic politics from below.

Furthermore, the established NGOs are important in creating infrastructure which can benefit local activism. Many of the postethnic activists, who organise voluntary work with little or no resources, mention that large NGOs support their activities by providing venues, transport and communication channels that are essential for the activities. Large NGOs, such as Arbetarnas Bildningsförbund (Workers' Educational Association), can provide the needed resources to organise seminars and other meeting places that collect diverse groups under one roof. In such work, urban activists who take up positions in these NGOs can make its resources work for the benefit of activism and local civil society organising. Idealising voluntary work and 'pure' activism may result in ignorance of the time pressures and exhaustion that come with voluntary work, usually conducted on top of paid work or studies, family responsibilities and other everyday commitments. It may also lead to bypassing effective spaces of working for social change, even when they are fraught with contradictory tendencies.

Local resistance and the Ghetto Plans

Swedish politicians are frequently looking for guidance in the harsh Danish criminal and migration policies, when planning means to tackle social problems in the marginalised suburbs. The Danish policies are, indeed, an illuminating example of what I at the beginning of this chapter called the 'penal welfare state,' when developing ideas presented by Wacquant (2009) and Dikeç (2007) to fit into the Nordic context. The penal welfare state in Denmark has since the early 2000s developed on three main pillars – strict immigration policy (see Chapter 1), targeted criminal policies on gang related crimes, and urban policies framed around the notion of the 'ghetto.'

In 2004, the Danish government established a programme to combat 'ghettoisation,' connecting 'non-western' immigration to segregation and what is discussed as 'parallel societies' with different value systems and lack of social cohesion. In the policy document titled the Ghetto Plan of 2010, specific administrative and statistical criteria were defined to distinguish a 'ghetto' from ordinary residential areas and in the subsequent years additional criteria were included (Simonsen, 2016; Meret, 2020). The Ghetto Plan from 2018 identifies three kinds of problem areas: 'vulnerable areas,' 'ghettos' and 'hard ghettos.' Residential areas are listed as 'ghettos' on the basis of scale (at least 1000 inhabitants), share of migrants or descendants from 'non-western' countries (over 50 %), labour market participation, educational level, income level and criminality rate (Fallov and Birk, 2021). The criteria of having over 1000 inhabitants, with more than half of them of 'non-western origin,' is decisive. In order to be listed as a 'ghetto,' two other criteria need to be fulfilled, while merely low education, high unemployment and high criminality rate do not result in the definition of a 'ghetto.' If the area is listed as 'ghetto' for five consecutive years, it is defined as a 'hard ghetto.' In the policy documents and political debates, the marginalised urban areas are described as antagonists of Danish society that threaten its social cohesion and which need to be exterminated (Simonsen, 2016).

Urban activism and local work within housing estates is in many ways affected by the 'ghetto' policy context. During my fieldwork, I was introduced to a project that oper-ated with municipal funds reserved for enhancing social cohesion and improving security in marginalised neighbourhoods. The project was based in a housing estate in Nørrebro in a part of Copenhagen that was often connected to criminality, radical extremism and marginalisation in public discussions. Unlike many of the projects in the area, the main methods of this project were centred around creating housing democracy and involving the residents in the development of a safe and pleasant residential environment. In many ways, the aims resembled those of the urban activists in the Swedish suburbs, discussed above. The project leader collected a multiracial team, some of whom lived in the area, to work with youth groups, women's groups and parent groups in the estate. They used arts methods and community organising to engage the residents in shaping their neighbourhoods. One of the team members remembers the conscious effort to involve the residents in designing the activities and the strong dedication of the project leader and the other workers, which she saw as the reasons for the broad participation of the residents. However, when the residents took an active role in the planning of the activities, they ended up in conflict with the housing association.

> They made other decisions than the ones the housing association wanted them to do. The residents said let's not do these things and we want to go in this direction. (…) This was their own direction, their own local community.
>
> *(Shazana, Denmark)*

After the conflict between the residents and the housing association, the project was merged together with other local projects, and a new leader, with more con-ventional working methods, was selected. The funding for the activities at the housing estate was cut down and the number of workers reduced. The residents continued to organise some of the activities that they had initiated, but were hampered by the lack of resources and the thwarting of the new project leader. Naima, who worked in the project but had left by the time the decision of the merging was made, has a clear view on why the project ended – its unconventional methods and aim to create housing democracy did not fit into the municipal strategy of promoting social cohesion and security.

> Suvi: How do you see this related to other local projects, were there differences in the aims or ways of working or do you think it was very much like other projects?
>
> Naima: I don't think they would have been shut down if they had been very much like other projects. [both laugh]

This example shows that the possibilities for activists to create change within public–private collaboration are context specific and may include national varia-tions. In light of this study, the Danish political and policy context does not seem very favourable for such strategies. Nevertheless, Danish society has also seen the

rise of urban activism in the marginalised neighbourhoods. It has developed as resistance to the urban policy outlined in the Ghetto Plan of 2018 titled "One Denmark without Parallel Societies – No Ghettos in 2030," mobilising residents and supporters throughout the country. The effects of the 'ghetto' policy are far reaching and possibly detrimental to the affected neighbourhoods, as they include large-scale renovations, reconstructions and demolitions of housing, as well as evictions of the tenants. The aim of the government is to decrease the number of 'non-western' migrants and descendants in the areas labelled as 'ghettos' and 'hard ghettos' to a maximum of 30 % by 2030 (Konggaard, 2021). It has been estimated that 11,000 tenants are affected by the plans to restructure public housing as a result of the latest Ghetto Plan (O'Sullivan, 2020). Local municipalities and housing companies have chosen different paths to achieve this. The 'ghetto' areas in Aarhus, the second largest city in Denmark, are witnessing the demolition of public housing and racialised minority tenants are required to move to other areas, in order to reach the aim of decreasing the number of residents with 'non-western origin.' In Copenhagen, the housing companies have opted for a selling out of large parts of the public housing, with the aim of renovating these and building new housing that will attract white Danish residents with a higher income level, as well as elderly people and students. The current tenants are offered housing elsewhere in the city, but are not able to decide on the location or costs of the new accommodation.

The Ghetto Plan (Danish Government, 2018) also designed actions to combat criminality through increasing the presence of the police and establishing harsher punishments for crimes committed in the marginalised neighbourhoods, so-called stricter punishment zones (*skærpet strafzone*). It also sanctioned the eviction of family members of those who commit crimes. Moreover, the law stipulates compulsory kindergarten for children in the 'ghettos' and regulates the number of children of 'non-western' origin allowed in local kindergartens.

The resistance and protests against the 'ghetto' policy have been led by the organisation Almen Modstand (General Resistance). It was established in 2018 after the policy agreement, involving most parties in the Danish Parliament, was announced. Almen Modstand organised demonstrations in several cities during its first months of existence and has continued with local activism since then. The organisation has combined activities to organise and support tenants in the housing estates targeted by the 'ghetto' regulations, with a political criticism of the downsizing of the public housing sector, which is interpreted as an intention to enhance gentrification and promote the interests of private housing companies. Fatma Tounsi, a co-establisher and activist in Almen Modstand based in Copenhagen, argued for the need to stand together in solidarity with those who face removals, evictions and other uncertainties in relation to their housing situation.

> Many of those who live in public housing are older people or people who in one way or the other find it difficult to get their views heard in the political

debate. That is why we have gathered together in Almen Modstand, so that the resident out here can be heard.

<div align="right">(Beboerbladet, 2018)</div>

Almen Modstand has local groups in several cities and neighbourhoods, which have sought to tackle the threats towards tenants in the housing estates aimed to be sold out, demolished or reconstructed. The residents at Mjølnerparken in Nørrebro, Copenhagen, campaigned against the plans by the private housing company Bo-Vita to sell out half of the housing in the neighbourhood and relocate the tenants to other parts of the city. A number of the tenants refused to move out of their rental apartments. In Gellerup and Bispehaven, two neighbourhoods in the city of Aarhus, tenants and local activists have organised demonstrations against the tearing down of housing blocks and in support of those who have been given the notice to quit their apartments. In 2020, the activists of Almen Modstand collected over 50,000 signatures to bring the citizen initiative to discussion in the Danish Parliament. The citizen initiative demanded the removal of the 2018 Ghetto laws and the abolishing of the lists that divide residential areas into 'vulnerable areas,' 'ghettos' and 'hard ghettos.' It envisioned that these acts would lead to an end of the discrimination and differential treatment enacted by the 'ghetto' policy. The gathering of the signatures to the citizen initiative was a huge achievement and its parliamentary processing was combined with local demonstrations and national publicity. Although the government turned down the demands, the activists gained wide visibility and support for their campaign.

In addition to demonstrations, campaigns and the collection of signatures, the tenants and Almen Modstand have initiated judicial complaints in the hope of hindering evictions and changing the racialising urban policies. A group of residents at Mjølnerparken in Nørrebro joined forces with a law company and the Danish Human Rights Institute to file a complaint about ethnic discrimination in the 'ghetto' laws due to their way of using the category 'non-western immigrants and descendants.' In the summer of 2021, Almen Modstand and residents at Blågårdsplads in the Nørrebro area in Copenhagen demonstrated against the eviction of entire families where one of the family members had received a criminal sentence. The evictions are legal under the 'ghetto' legislation, but the activists and tenants have argued against this kind of collective punishment. The criminal sentences were a result of reactions to a racist provocation by an extreme right politician. The campaign found support from different actors, but the housing company was unwilling to withdraw the evictions.

Conclusions

This chapter has examined how postethnic activists in the racialised and marginalised urban areas that in Sweden are called suburbs and in Denmark 'ghettos' deal with the effects of racial capitalism and neoliberal policies. Racial capitalism designates certain urban spaces and populations as non-productive 'wastelands,' while at

the same time valuing other areas and groups as productive and central to capitalist accumulation. Neoliberal policies that have strengthened the socio-economic inequalities and the privatisation of health and welfare services, together with the emphasis on the politics of penalty, have shaped the context of urban activism in the Nordic region. However, the studied urban neighbourhoods are also sites of lively political and cultural activism. The activists organise resistance towards the privatisation of housing, securitisation of poverty and the stigmatisation of the racialised suburbs. They combine actions against neoliberal privatisation and gentrification with those criticising racialised criminalisation and the increasing presence of the police in the suburbs.

The activist groups also host cultural events and art scenes, especially active in spoken word, visual arts and urban culture, including translocal and nation-wide cooperation. The cultural insurgence provides means for the young people in the stigmatised areas to articulate their experiences of racism, class inequalities and loss of friends through violent death, but also of friendship, affectionate relations and self-respect. These cultural activities are firmly rooted in the local neighbourhoods and largely depend on volunteer work. The cultural activism discussed in this chapter is also closely connected to organisations and groups that develop grass roots political activities in the suburbs. Pressures to gather funding and navigate the difficult landscape of public–private collaboration become more tangible when the activities grow in scope or when activists seek to work within large established NGOs and housing associations. However, even within these contexts, some postethnic activists are carving out space to enhance the politics of social justice. These possibilities seem to apply more to the Swedish context, while the Danish part of the study suggests that the space for autonomy and strengthening the participation of the residents within public–private cooperation is more restricted. In Denmark, the organisation Almen Modstand has been successful in organising local residents and finding broad support for their actions to combat the government's 'ghetto' policy, but the results of these actions are yet to be seen and the repressive political environment is in many ways resistant towards demands arising from the marginalised urban areas.

Notes

1 This can be interpeted as one form of the 'white saviour' mentality that postcolonial scholars have identified in a number of contexts (e.g. Spivak, 1990).
2 Since the interviews were conducted, the school results in the area have somewhat improved, but a large share of the pupils still finish school without qualifications in upper-secondary education.

8

HISTORIES, STORIES AND IMAGINARIES

Introduction

In this chapter, I build on the idea of 'the politics of imagination' (Bottici and Challand, 2011; Latimer and Skeggs, 2011) to grasp how postethnic activism involves a creative and transformative element. All strands of postethnic activism studied in this book aim for social change, although the visions of how to achieve this and what the future would look like differ to some extent. Living in a society that dehumanises and provides different life options on the basis of race and class is the starting point of struggles against oppressive power relations, but also of a search for new ways of living together and activities that seek to transform existing conditions. In his study on the Black radical imagination, Robin D. G. Kelley (2002) argues that visions of other kinds of futures and 'freedom dreams' are what make people struggle for social change. These dreams inspire political commitment in new generations and build bridges between different generations of activists. In his words, "revolutionary dreams erupt out of political engagement; collective social movements are incubators of new knowledge" (Kelley, 2002, p. 8). Collective action and shared struggles create understandings about the transformative potential of organising, but also function as sites for imagining better futures.

The production of images is an elementary part of politics – even a discussion of the public or any political community requires to first imagine such entities (Bottici, 2011). While imagination is often thought of as an individual characteristic, scholars have pointed out the impact of the social context and the way social imaginaries frame our thinking. Imaginaries are not oppositions to reality; instead, they are embedded in social and cultural contexts, while also having political functions – imaginaries 'do political work' as Joanna Latimer and Beverley Skeggs, (2011, p. 397) frame it. Imagination has a radical potential, since it allows us "to mentally remove ourselves from where we are physically located and imagine that

things might as well be different from what they actually are" (Bottici, 2011, p. 24). It has a potential to both disrupt existing social orders and constitute new subversive understandings of politics. Political imagination means 'keeping open and critical' (Latimer and Skeggs, 2011), which involves both seeking to uncover existing power differences and holding onto the thought that the society and social relations could look different.

This chapter argues that postethnic activists are developing new political imaginaries through a focus on 'the past in the present' and 'the future in the present.' Narratives and stories are an important resource for the creation of new imaginaries, since they enable the articulation of experiences, sharing them with others (who do or do not have similar experiences) and building bridges between events earlier disconnected or ignored. Making new interpretations of the past and its implications for the present is one way to open up space for politics that would move beyond conventional imaginaries. Likewise, connecting the present to anticipated futures enables us to pose new questions and political agendas for today's politics. The chapter further argues that the activists create political imaginaries that do not stick to the connected temporalities of past–present–future but break the links between these. This kind of thinking envisions 'dreaming' as something radically different from the present – as a hazy and blurred image that is not easy to pinpoint, but is nevertheless vital for both survival and the creation of better futures.

Large parts of current politics witness a lack of political imagination and an adoption of conventional thinking rather than a circulation of new ideas and transformative visions, which scholars interpret as a reflection of the postpolitical and neoliberal tendencies of our time (Bottici and Challand, 2011; Latimer and Skeggs, 2011; Bottici, 2014). It is, indeed, easy to slip into the reproduction of existing images and political agendas, instead of radically challenging them and creating new imaginaries. For the postethnic activists, the difficulties are not predominantly related to the postpolitical atmosphere, as they are engaged in a re-politicisation of racial, class and gender inequalities that challenge neoliberal tendencies of de-politicisation. Instead, some activists point out that they are highly occupied with everyday struggles and it may be difficult to find the time and space for envisioning futures in the midst of organising. Future visions can also be difficult to articulate, although the activists would find them important. In the interpretation I make here, political imagination and dreams of a better future are often intertwined with current struggles and created from within them – they arise from the actions themselves, instead of being a separate sphere. In the following, I present my reading of activities that are not always discussed as imaginaries or future visions by the activists, and combine this analysis with a discussion of more explicit ways of articulating 'dreaming' by the activists.

Marginalised histories in racial nordicisation

Postethnic activists are critically engaging with the notions built into racial nordicisation (see Chapter 2), notably the understandings of the Nordic countries as

outsiders to the colonial project and as the superpowers of humanitarianism, egalitarianism and peace building. They draw upon research and journalism that addresses the colonial and racial histories of the Nordic countries in order to connect current struggles against racism to global histories of colonialism and racial thinking. Swedish and Danish activists have brought public attention to the countries' histories of colonialism notably in the Caribbean, as well as their participation in the trade of enslaved persons. Finnish activists have been especially interested in the histories of colonial trade and missionary work in Southern Africa, as well as the colonisation of the Indigenous Sámi territories in the Arctic. These subversive narratives of history have been articulated through arts, educational projects on social media, media sites run by racialised minority actors, and town walks. The narrative that emphasises continuities from the past to the present informs and gives strength to the activists' argument of structural racism and dehumanisation processes in today's Nordic countries, which counteract the countries' self-images as 'good nations.'

In order to create historical knowledge, the past needs to be imagined and individual events connected to each other in meaningful ways. Hayden White (2011) regards narrative as the central link between history and politics. Narratives provide genealogical understandings of events that may at first sight appear as breaks with the past, as well as enabling an explanation of how certain beginnings may result in their respective endings. Narratives function as a 'structure of temporal coherence' bringing together events that would otherwise be thought of as singular and detached from each other: narrativisation "endows events with meaning by distributing them into the past–present–future of the general past" (White, 2011, p. 164). Postethnic activists, who articulate what I call the 'past in the present,' build on narrativisation to rewrite national histories and highlight global connections. In doing so, they develop understandings of the historical roots of racial hierarchies and exclusions in today's societies, but also make history matter in current political struggles.

Although the Swedish histories of colonialism and trade of enslaved persons are not very well known internationally or even in Sweden, Black activists have worked to raise awareness of these historical legacies for a number of years. Among the organisations involved in such work is Afrosvenskarnas riksorganisation (The Afro-Swedish National Organisation) and its local groups. A large part of the organisation's work to publicly address issues of Swedish colonialism and trade of enslaved persons has taken place on a voluntary basis, but in 2014 the association managed to secure funding for the project "In the footsteps of slave trade." The project aimed to counteract anti-Black racism and inform about its historical roots in Swedish society. As the following quote shows, this history is thought of as important for public understandings of today's racism against members of the African diaspora, and the 'past in the present' is a very mundane question for Black people in Sweden.

> We want to bring attention to the memorialisation of the abolishing of the Swedish transatlantic slave trade. The aim is to make politicians, authorities and officials understand the seriousness of Afrophobia in Sweden today. We

also want them to recognise and provide space in the official sphere to Black people's suffering, in which Sweden has also been involved. And to think about the consequences of this on people's lives, people's health and quality of life today, its legacy so to say.

(Said, Sweden)

The project built on an extensive cartography of existing research on the topic and sought to educate both ordinary Swedes and decision makers on the history of Swedish involvement in the enslavement of Black people. The project organised study circles and seminars for the general public, and produced materials for self-learning on these questions. Afrosvenskarnas riksorganisation also reached out to and lobbied politicians and administrators on the commemoration of the Swedish trade of enslaved persons and sought to establish a statue to mark Black people's history.

The histories of colonialism and racism were also located in the urban spaces of Stockholm through a series of city walks, where the participants could follow in the footsteps of the traders of enslaved persons. During the fieldwork, I joined this city walk and gained a completely new perspective on the historical and tourist-filled part of Stockholm, Gamla stan, which I had visited numerous times since childhood. The city walk started in the museum of economic history, Myntkabinettet, in which the history of coins was used to describe the Swedish colonisation of St. Barthélemy and the colonial trade in the Caribbean. The walk continued through Gamla stan to highlight the places where historical events took place. For me, the walk crystallised the difference between merely reading research on colonial and racial histories and actually seeing the city with new eyes. Witnessing houses built with the wealth created from the transatlantic trade of enslaved persons and other forms of colonial trade, as well as hearing stories of members of the African diaspora brought from the Swedish colony in the Caribbean to live in Stockholm, made the relation between the past and the present very lively. In effect, I was also imagining the 'past in the present.' Walking in a mixed group of people, some living in Sweden and others visiting it, made me also wonder how things would change and what would be needed for this kind of city walk to be part of the common tourist information provided for foreigners, young people and small town visitors to the capital. The future was thus lurking as a possibility in my imagination – things could be different and national narratives could be rewritten even on a larger scale.

The centenary of the selling of the Danish colonies in the Caribbean to the US in 1917 was a springboard for many exhibitions in museums, publications and events organised by artists and activists to commemorate Danish colonial history (Jensen, 2019). An influential action that combined arts with the perspective of social change was a statue project titled "I am Queen Mary," created in dialogue between two Black artists – Jeannette Ehlers from Denmark and LaVaughn Belle from the former Danish colony today known as the US Virgin Islands.[1] The statue features the sugar cane plantation worker Mary Thomas, who was one of three women who led a powerful labour revolt in the Danish Caribbean colonies in 1878. While Mary Thomas is well known in the US Virgin Islands and portrayed

in vernacular culture, she is hardly ever mentioned in Danish history writing or public discussions. The statue, developed collaboratively by the two artists, was placed at the West India Warehouse in the harbour front in central Copenhagen to memorialise the colonial trade and the intertwined histories of Denmark and the US Virgin Islands. The sculpture raised broad media interest and was successful in bringing discussions of the 'past in the present' to the public sphere. The statue that was originally of a temporary nature is envisioned to become a permanent part of the city space. The plan has gained permission from the Danish government and the artists have launched a funding campaign to enable a rebuilding of the sculpture in both Copenhagen and the US Virgin Islands.

The activist collective Marronage (see also Chapter 6) was established to politicise the commemoration of Danish colonialism and to make connections between history and today's racial relations. The group emphasises the relevance of slavery and colonialism to the personal histories of the activists, who present themselves as descendants of enslaved Africans and descendants of migrants from areas previously colonised by Europeans. The collective has been active in creating resistance towards Danish asylum policy, especially the incarceration of asylum seekers who have received a negative decision on their asylum application and are waiting for deportation in prison-like conditions. Marronage brings the 'past to the present' by emphasising the continuum of state racism and necropolitics (Mbembe, 2003), that is, the state's exercise of power to decide on who will live and who will die. According to Marronage, enslavement and colonisation created an oppressive structure and epistemological paradigm that continue today in the form of deportation camps and the sentencing of irregular migrants to a slow death.

> This is not about a paradigm shift. Politicians continue with the death politics that once made Denmark the world's seventh biggest slave nation. For some people equality means expanding the parental leave system, while other parents are robbed of their freedom and placed for an indefinite time in military barracks with their children. In the deportation camp Sjælsmark, the state is slowly slaying rejected asylum seekers. People's lives are suspended by 'motivation enhancing institutions,' aimed to make their lives as unbearable as possible.
>
> *(Marronage, 2019)*

A real paradigm shift would require a break with the tradition of colonialism, enslavement and necropolitics, which does not seem to be within reach. The debate article by Marronage, cited above, was published on Women's Day, 8th of March. It called for a change in feminist politics and the whole political landscape in Denmark. This change would take place through actions that centre the struggles of asylum seekers, tenants in public housing, receivers of social benefits, queer persons, Muslims, trans persons, descendants of migrants and other groups who hold onto politics with a firm ethical basis. It thus not only imagines the 'past in the present' but connects it to the 'future in the present,' calling for a coalitional politics that could open up new political and epistemological avenues.

Finnish artists and activists have been especially interested in colonial histories that connect to missionary work in Southern Africa and the migration of Africans to Finland in the late 19th and early 20th century. The story of the first African person to receive Finnish citizenship, Rosa Emilia Clay, has been a powerful symbol of the African presence in Finland historically. The Black visual artist Sasha Huber has portrayed Rosa Clay in her series of the 'Firsts,' which presents remarkable persons of African descent who have paved the way for those who came later. Rosa Clay was born in what is today known as Namibia and was adopted by a Finnish missionary family, who brought her to Finland in 1888 (Rastas, 2019b; Mkwesha and Huber, 2021). Clay was educated as a schoolteacher and taught in Finnish schools before moving to the US in 1904, where she became an active member of the labour movement and the Finnish migrant community. The history of Rosa Clay and other Africans in Finland was also a topic discussed in the podcast series "Searching for the history of Afro-Finland," created by Ruskeat Tytöt Media (Brown Girls Media), a media platform run by racialised minority activists (see Chapter 6).[2] The first podcast explored Finnish histories of colonialism and the history of Africans in Finland. The other podcasts in the series delved into family histories, relations to African-American history and Afrofuturism. Thus, the podcasts both imagined the 'past in the present' and opened up discussions of how the future can be envisioned through Afrocentric aesthetics and philosophy.

Moreover, activists and artists in Finland have found connections to Indigenous Sámi struggles and colonialism in the Arctic an important part of imagining the 'past in the present.' The artists and activists racialised as non-white have taken the initiative to networks and events in which Sámi activists and artists participate, broadening the discussion from overseas colonialism to colonialism within the Nordic region and the continued settler colonial logic. For example, the intercultural and antiracist yearly event #StopHatredNow, which has gathered art and cultural organisations and activists since 2016 to discuss antiracist strategies, intersectional feminism and inclusivity, has involved a strong presence of Sámi artists and activists in the programme each year. The Indigenous questions and Sámi perspectives also make the temporal relation of the 'past in the present' very tangible, as many Sámi activists view colonisation as an ongoing process. In such imaginaries, the power structures are not articulated as neo-colonialism or historical legacies, but as colonisation that has never ended.

Narrating family histories and national belonging

As some of the previous examples of imagining the 'past in the present' show, imagination can follow the 'structure of temporal coherence' of narrative to anticipate or create images of the future. Hayden White (2011) points to the legacy of Hegelian thinking in discussions that consider narratives central for historical knowledge. Hegelian thinking has affected Marxist thought and many other ideologies that inspire the postethnic activism of this study – indeed, even my own thinking. Such thinking not only relates the past to the present, but also presents

the future as embedded in a latent form in the present. The future is seen to develop out of the present. Such thinking is not necessarily deterministic: the present includes possibilities for several kinds of futures and many factors, not least political action, are decisive for the route it will take. The following analysis of the politics of imagination highlights even stronger narrative connections between the past, present and future.

The action 'Roadtrip to the new Denmark' developed out of discussions between a few mothers whose children went to elementary school in the area of Nørrebro in Copenhagen. The mothers shared a worry about the exclusionary notions of Danishness and the narrow understanding of history that teaching at school is based on. These discussions resulted in a roadtrip by five mothers and their children who drove from Nørrebro to other parts of Denmark, visiting grandparents and other relatives of the participants. The mixed group of white Danes and mothers with a family background in Pakistan, Morocco and Syria sought to create a new understanding of Danish history through an examination of their diverse family histories and the engagement of the children in learning about the life of previous generations. The children interviewed each other's grandparents and friends of the parents to understand family histories that spread across Denmark and between several continents. Naaz, who was one of the initiators of the action, describes the starting point as letting the children create interpretations of history and community:

> We were women, first of all, mothers worried about the way our children are going to be perceived in this society. And we thought that if we let the children decide what's history, if we let them filter through what they see then that's history, that's a different way of describing it. They went to my mother and the other grandparents and what they experienced there was they saw similarities. They were curious, but still to them it wasn't really, they were very accepting of this being part of our history. (…) it also created a common history for the children. Because they went from Nørrebro out to [the rest of] Denmark and came back.
>
> *(Naaz, Denmark)*

The project results were presented in the form of photography, drawings and stories of the family histories, and developed into an exhibition, to which other children in the local schools were invited. Other classes at the local schools were also introduced to the work on family histories and the creation of Danish history. Through such acts, the children included the often ignored histories of ethnicised and racialised minorities in the national narrative. Naaz explains this as an act of claiming presence and the right to belong in Denmark, which is important for the children but also for future ways of living together as a society.

> We wanted them to make a movement in their mind from being, well, I'm Palestinian, I'm a Pakistani, to I'm a Dane. Claiming history, claiming their

> space and their existence in the society. (…) And it's not dependent on whether or not anyone else is accepting me, I'm claiming it. By doing so, by saying it, I am Danish. And that's also the idea… that if everyone claims that they are Danish and they are a part of the Danish history [things can change].
>
> (Naaz, Denmark)

The idea of re-narrating national history and belongingness was also spread in the local neighbourhood, when the project results were presented on a public fence in a busy traffic area near the metro station, with the aim of reaching out to the residents of the diverse neighbourhood of Nørrebro. Moreover, social media communication was used to document the roadtrip events and spread the ideas of the project. The mothers further initiated a social media campaign that invited children and adults across ethnicised and racialised divisions to photograph themselves with the text "Jeg er Danmarkshistorie," to be placed on the campaign webpages. The slogan played with the double meaning of the word *historie* in Danish, as it refers both to history and story. Thus, the slogan can be translated as both "I am Danish history" and "I am the story of Denmark." The slogan connects the claim of national belonging to the three temporalities of the narrative – from the history of Denmark to the present and the future story of the country. Already during the roadtrip across the country, the mothers had made an effort to symbolically 'own' Danish history by taking photos, in which they and their children posed next to monuments and museums that play a central role in the nationalist and exclusionary history narrative. The photos were used in social media communication, as well as printed on postcards that were distributed at the events organised.

> We took a lot of photos where we stand like this in the Danish, you know, in front of some of the museums or important places. So we stand there with the Danish flags and then we made these postcards… this where it says I'm the history of Denmark. So it's a, you know, manifestation.
>
> (Lotte, Denmark)

The roadtrip, school events and social media campaign used personal and family histories to initiate grass roots change to national narratives and a sense of belongingness. It grew out of the concerns of mothers who witnessed their children's experiences of unbelonging and exclusion despite the fact that they were often the grandchildren of migrants and firmly rooted in their localities in Denmark. The actions also developed from the concerns of some white Danish mothers, whose lived experience in the diverse neighbourhood and school was at odds with the hegemonic Danish discourses of nationhood and belonging. They saw their children's future as part of a national narrative that would better reflect the existing diversity of the urban neighbourhood in which they lived.

Such a re-narration of national history and the story of the nation has a disturbing potential, as it seeks to change the understanding of legitimate actors and events that create the 'common' story of 'who we are' and 'where we come from.'

In a sense, the actions described above and the imaginaries they create reflect multicultural ideologies and 'horizons' (Hall, 2000; Fortier, 2004) which are at odds with the existing Danish policies of strong assimilation and repression of racialised minorities (see Chapter 1). In this context, claiming an unapologetic right to presence and 'ownership' of the place in which one is born and raised is radical. The actions and imaginaries are also different from those spread by multicultural projects initiated by municipalities or mainstream NGOs, as they arise from the everyday concerns of the residents and seek to challenge instead of uphold the status quo. The mothers sought to organise parents and children in schools, as well as to draw the attention of the residents in the neighbourhoods to the question of how to combat exclusionary notions of national belonging and history education that ignored them. The mothers argued that the education of the children should reflect the existing diversity of family histories and relate to the transnational lives that many children lived, which required a broadening of the curricula and teaching methods. The roadtrip also built narratives of nation and belonging that connected Denmark to the histories of other countries and continents, reflected in the stories of migration and diasporic lives that (some of) the participants brought to the project.

Nevertheless, expectations of 'happy multiculturalism' were to some extent embedded in the project and resulted in ignorance of issues that can arise in the encounters between white majority people and racialised minority persons. During the roadtrip, an elderly relative of one of the white Danish women made and posed racist comments and questions to one of the Muslim mothers. The elderly man challenged the belongingness of Muslims in Danish society and initiated a test of Danishness, based on the completion of a crossword puzzle. While the filling of the crossword involved a dialogue between the challenged mother and the elderly relative, the example clearly shows the power relations present in such encounters and the unequal standings between those who can claim governmental belonging (Hage, 2000) by initiating 'tests' of national belonging and those who barely have access to a sense of belonging.

Intergenerational justice

Family relations are also the starting point of imaginaries that I refer to as intergenerational justice. Intergenerational justice is a concept commonly drawn upon in discussions on climate politics and injustices *between* different generations (e.g. Favretto and Balduzzi, 2020; Kenis, 2021). In such use, intergenerational justice is understood as dividing generations that are seen as having different interests. Social justice is thought of as something future generations deserve, while the present generations are portrayed as using more resources than they are entitled to. Questions of race and racism are seldom addressed in this literature. In contrast to this research tradition, I use the concept intergeneration justice to refer to images and claims that create bonds *across* generations on the basis of struggles against racial injustice. In such use, intergenerational justice functions as a motivating factor for political

activism that creates bonds between generations in search of social justice. Future generations deserve more social justice than the present and past generations, but not because these are greedy or using more than their share of resources. Instead, the intergenerational justice that the postethnic activists are imagining aims to dismantle the continuum of injustice that characterises the lives of several generations, connecting rather than dividing their interests.

For many activists who have children of their own, working for a better future for them is an important motivator. The driving force for Shirley is creating a world that would enable her children to live without the kind of racist assumptions and exclusions in everyday environments that she herself encounters. Her vision of creating a better society requires working against the dehumanisation and oppression of Afro-Swedes in the present, but the image is clearly future oriented.

> Something happened with me when I got children. It was only then that I became very active and very driven. I feel that I must leave something for my children. They need to get it better than I've had. (…) I struggle for my children, so that they can be seen as Morgan and Dina and not like Black people. People have this assumption that Black people are of a certain kind, they are loud, they are this and that. I want people to stop assuming, having these prejudices. Which I still face, when people look at me in strange ways or don't want to sit next to me because of my skin colour.
>
> *(Shirley, Sweden)*

Young adults who reflect on the injustices they see in their parents' life situations also create imaginaries of intergenerational justice. Witnessing how his parents have worked hard and sought to find a place in Swedish society, yet not received the respect and benefits others are granted, makes Said work for social justice. He connects himself to his family histories and relates back to the colonial times when his grandparents were young, interpreting the common denominator as racial inequalities and their ideological legitimation. Past and present injustices are, thus, reasons to organise and try to change the future.

> I see how my own parents are all the time passed by people who don't maybe make so much effort in life as my parents. Their efforts do not bear as fruitful results as other people's efforts. I see my grandparents' generation… for example, my grandmother who I've lived with for a long time, I see the conditions she has had to live in. And some people, both in her time and in my time, think that it's right to have this inequality based on people's characteristics. It could be related to other matters too, but in this case, it's about skin colour. It makes me really angry and it creates a lot of damage to me, to see so much injustice.
>
> *(Said, Sweden)*

The organisation Pensionsrättvisa (Pension justice) was established to demand more equity in the Swedish pension system. It grew out of concerns presented in

the Facebook group of the antiracist feminist organisation StreetGäris, in which the lack of information about pensions in different languages and low level of pensions for elderly migrants were addressed. The concerns led into the establishment of Pensionsrättvisa, an organisation that works for a safe and ethically based pension system that would guarantee decent pensions irrespective of gender, migration background, level of income, work position or able-bodiedness. The organisation highlights the discriminatory aspects of the existing pension system, which reflects the employment histories and previous salary levels of the retired persons, thus exacerbating the existing social inequalities. It argues that the expectations of long employment histories and full-time work do not correspond with the labour market conditions that especially migrants, racialised minorities, women and other non-normative groups face. Difficulties in gaining full-time employment, time spent at home taking care of children and other family members, physically demanding jobs that result in early retirement, jobs that do not result in employment pension and other structural factors disproportionately disadvantage migrants, racialised minorities and women in the existing pension system.

Pensionsrättvisa was established by young racialised minority women, who saw their parents work hard to secure employment in the discriminating labour market, yet were faced with the prospect of low pensions and old age in poverty. The activists demand justice for their parents' generation and a change in the discriminatory pension system, but they also speak for themselves and their own future. Amber, who is active in Pensionsrättvisa, points out that her way of living is connected to that of her parents' generation through the financial help she will need to provide for them. Moreover, she identifies her own position in the gendered and racialised hierarchies, which poses risks for her own financial standing and future life prospects.

> It's a very personal matter for me, because I see how my family is affected by this and I've always in a way understood that my parents' pension would be a problem. That it would be very small and insufficient. I've always been worried about it and understood that I need to contribute. (…) And it's not just my parents, many people in my surroundings see the same thing, understand how it's going to be. It's very personal. And the more I read, the better I understand how I myself also will be affected. However hard I work and irrespective of what I do, I'm placed in a certain position because of who I am.
>
> (Amber, Sweden)

Already from the start, Pensionsrättvisa received attention from more established pension organisations, trade unions and journalists. Representatives of the established organisations and media houses found it interesting that young women were mobilising around questions of pensions, thought of as being a rather distant topic for them. The fact that the activists spoke for and from within racialised minority communities was also seen as a new phenomenon. The established organisations, consisting mainly of white majority members, had found it difficult to reach out to racialised minority

groups and welcomed Pensionsrättvisa as a cooperative partner that would enable them to broaden the scope both of questions to address and groups represented in the matter. Nevertheless, the understanding of intergenerational justice that the activists in Pensionsrättvisa promote has not always been whole-heartedly embraced. The activists witness a partial acceptance of their perspectives, with the question of antiracism and racial discrimination receiving less acceptance than the discussion on gendered inequalities built into the pension system.

> We want to emphasise the antiracist question, because for us this is a question of discrimination and we want to point out the racism of the system. And that provokes. There's a lot of cautiousness [in these organisations], like: maybe we can't define it like that.
>
> *(Nihal, Sweden)*

Intergenerational relations are not only a source of concern for the well-being of the older generation, or for the future generation as in the images by the parents who seek to ensure social justice for their children. Intergenerational relations are also a resource for organising and community building. Zeinab and Lania find that their activism and work for social justice owes a great deal to the intergenerational gift that they have received from their parents. Having grown up with politically active parents, they have both participated in meetings and listened to discussions about social change since they were small children. This knowledge of the impact and forms of organising has guided them in their activism and provided a strong basis for their own work for social justice. It may take somewhat different forms than their parents' work for political organising and democracy, but there is also a strong line of connection between the generations in working for social justice.

> Zeinab: What comes to this activist part, we have pretty similar backgrounds. It has come from home very much. We have politically active parents, who were active already in their home country. And we grew up with that kind of discussions at home. It's been part of growing up, without us having to so much reflect about it. That's how it's been. But the older we have gotten, the more we have understood that we have received this knowledge for free. (Lania: A priviledge like.) (…) We have always been with our parents in meetings and activities. Which has then resulted in that we have understood that one can create change, one can affect what's happening.
>
> *(Zeinab and Lania, Sweden)*

Some of the activists also speak about their aim to provide a good environment for their children to grow up in, and such thinking can end up with views that favour the marginalised urban areas instead of white wealthier areas. Thomas who has a small child is very conscious about the racialised and classed inequalities that shape the living conditions in his residential area, but in his view the good sides of the neighbourhood will support his child's growth. In such thinking, the Million programme areas that are

stigmatised in media coverage and political discussions, as well as socio-economically marginalised, are in effect places that may ensure growing up on equal terms with other children. As Thomas sees it, living in a wealthier area among white majority citizens would expose his son to racialising and harmful interactions right from the start, which makes him opt for the 'normality' that his son can experience in the Million programme area.

> I've always thought that if I move, I want come back to the Million pro-gramme areas. (…) Where you don't have to… Kazem may not have to be so burdened with the question 'where do you actually come from.' Maybe he will hear it, but he won't be racialised in such a negative sense. He will be more on an equal foot with the other children. That's why we decided to live here, he can grow up here. Maybe he won't want to live here forever, but here's where it starts.
>
> *(Thomas, Sweden)*

Internationalist dreams and transnational solidarity

Internationalism has been a central part of the Black radical tradition. It was a guiding principle of the anti-colonial and Pan-African struggles that connected Marxist African–American activists and organisations to likeminded intellectuals and movements in the Caribbean, Africa, Europe and elsewhere between the two World Wars and in the post-WWII period (Kelley, 2002). Moreover, inter-nationalism inspired the struggles of the Black Panther movements of the 1960s and early 1970s in the US and the UK, as well as their building of contacts with anti-imperialist movements and governments in the 'Third World' (Narayan, 2019a, 2019b). Likewise, internationalist practices and dreams have been part of the socialist tradition in movements such as the Industrial Workers of the World (IWW) (Cole et al., 2017; Rana, 2018) and the 'racialised outsiders' of the British labour movement (Virdee, 2017). Within women's and feminist movements, internationalism also has a long history among those who have worked to tackle issues of racism and global injustice (Sandwell, 2018; Umoren, 2018).

Internationalism as solidarity across national borders and engagement in global freedom struggles is also present in the imaginaries of the postethnic activists of this study. Some activists see their work as directly connected to global struggles for social justice and changing the (post)colonial world order. Ahmed who was active in the organisation Förorten mot våld, an urban movement against violence and racialised marginality, locates the group's work in a global context. According to him, the organisation's struggle is part of a global struggle against class and racial hierarchies.

> We see ourselves as a collective, we think that we are part of a larger move-ment that fights for human rights and equity. We see ourselves as part of not only a national movement but also a large international movement. Because

we know that people are fighting for their rights even in other parts of the
world.

(Ahmed, Sweden)

Many of the internationalist imaginaries presented by the activists are related to the
criticism of European and national border regimes. To some extent, this may reflect the
time of my fieldwork, a large part of which took place soon after the large-scale refugee
migration in 2015, discussed in continental Europe as the Summer of Migration (e.g.
Hess and Kasparek, 2019) but in the Nordic region could rather be called the Autumn
of Migration. During the autumn months, civil society mobilised extensively to provide
for the everyday needs of the arriving migrants and to give advice on bureaucratic
encounters with authorities. Many activists criticised the governmental actions that lar-
gely focused on border controls and the tightening of asylum policies, which especially
in Sweden resulted in a policy shift. Sweden changed its liberal asylum policy to match
the stricter regulations of many other European countries in November 2015, whereas
the asylum policies in Denmark and Finland were strict to start with.

To refuse to respect nation-state borders is a disobedient action in itself. Many
people are not covered by the human right to mobility. Borders… are always
controlled by somebody – a nation-state or the EU. They are not the same for
everybody. Borders are the utmost symbol of holding some people inside and
others on the outside.

(Khalid, 2014)

Bahar, who organised activities in the marginalised urban neighbourhoods, had a
dream of open borders and a society that would take as its starting point human needs
instead of economic calculations. She also argued for the need of Sweden to recognise
its own role in international conflicts and the capitalist world order, in order to take
responsibility for the effects of its actions and provide refuge for those fleeing war and
conflicts. For Bahar, this is not an abstract question; instead, she locates herself within
the international relations that support conflicts through, for example, the arms trade
and the forced migration that follows from such entanglements.

I hope that people who come here can get the help they need, which is abso-
lutely not the case today. Terrible things happen. So I would like to have open
borders. Most of all I would like Sweden to recognise its own role in global
relations. You can't have closed doors when you are such a big part of a system
that creates wars, by selling arms to countries ruled by dictators from which
these people migrate. I myself am a person who has come from such a country
and I know Sweden has indirectly affected the situation. (…) It is a dream I
have that the self-image in Sweden would be better situated in reality and based
on that we could question and end this. So open borders and no arms trade.
And a human society in which people are respected.

(Bahar, Sweden)

Many activists were highly engaged in the 2015 civil society mobilisation that sought to provide food and clothing, find accommodation and take care of other elementary facilities needed by the arriving migrants. For Javed, a remarkable event and form of solidarity work was when he managed to organise a place to stay for the newly arrived refugees at his workplace, Arbetarnas Bildningsförbund (ABF, Workers Educational Association). Javed was able to combine his two areas of interest – being an activist and an employee in the large but relatively conventional NGO. ABF is the educational section of the Swedish labour movement, which organises seminars, study circles and classes in a variety of topics at low cost or for free. ABF has supported many postethnic activist groups by providing venues, spreading information about events and helping with organising of seminars. Nevertheless, the decision to accommodate newly arrived refugees in the large ABF house in central Stockholm was not self-evident, but a result of piecemeal decisions that gradually led to an all-day sheltering.

> I stood at the Central Station for a few nights in row and helped the voluntary workers there. (…) They had contacts with activists in Malmö who said: these people come with this train and the next train arrives at this time and so forth. At one point, an activist friend phoned me and asked whether we at the ABF house could… at first, they wanted a meeting room to discuss strategies and such. Then they asked if a few transit migrants could stay there a while just to rest and load batteries for mobile phones and regain their energy. We started doing that and then the house became a station for distributing food, fruit and clothes. Eventually we felt that we can't close the house in the evening when it was weekend and all.
> (Javed, Sweden)

A shelter in the middle of the everyday work at the ABF house required changing ordinary routines, such as relocating ABF activities to other parts of the house and organising sleeping facilities for a hundred persons. The activities also made a difference to how the NGO saw itself, introducing an element of activism and practical solidarity in its ways of working.

Many postethnic activists continued to support newly arrived migrants even after the initial period of practical help at train stations and with accommodation was over. Rosa, who has participated in several Afro-Finnish and Person of Colour groups, was the driving force of a group that organised drawing materials, toys and events for children residing at refugee centres in Finland. The group wanted to make children feel welcome by delivering a bag with personal messages and materials for playing, drawing and reading. In two southern suburbs of Stockholm, the group Between Neighbours (Granne till Granne) has organised social gatherings, area walks, help with administrative matters and children's events in the local neighbourhoods to connect newly arrived migrants with those who have lived in the area for some time.

Internationalism is also present in the diasporic events, demonstrations and opinion texts that address political events in the countries that the parents of the activists left

as refugees. For example, in 2019 the broad demonstrations in Chile and Lebanon were commented on actively by generations who either left these countries as small children or have heard about the political struggles through their parents' generation. In an opinion piece, young women naming themselves as the "daughters of political refugees forced to flee the Pinochet regime" demanded the Chilean government withdraw the military troops it had sent out onto the streets to combat demonstrations against its economic policies and the broad social inequalities. The writers connected their own political activism with that of the previous generation, but also with the ongoing struggles for democracy and equity in Chile and the solidarity movement all over the world.

> The brutality with which our parents were treated has set its print on our lives, we are politically active because we know what it means to be robbed of democracy. We never want to see a Chilean government restrain human rights and hamper people's struggles for equality, peace and democracy again(…) We have been able to continue our parents' struggle for equal society here, in a democracy. Their dreams and visions live on through us. It is time for those who are left in Chile to feel the same safety(…) The actions of the Chilean government have led to a movement that all over the world shouts: "Viva Chile, Viva el Pueblo."
>
> *(Rojas et al., 2019)*

Internationalism and transnational networks have also been developed among postethnic activists within the Nordic region. The organisation Interfem in Sweden invited activists in other Nordic countries to establish a Nordic antiracist feminist network, and with public funding a series of workshops for racialised minority feminists and Sámi feminists based in the Nordic countries was organised. The participants I met in the different localities all greatly valued these meetings and the possibility of sharing thoughts with similarly positioned activists in neighbouring countries and Sapmi (the land of the Sámi people).

> We applied for funding to establish a network for ourselves and have now been meeting for a few years. Suddenly these groups like Interfem have popped up here and there, plop plop, in Denmark and Norway [laughs]. Meeting people from all over the Nordic countries has been really rewarding.
>
> *(Idil, Finland)*

Future dreams

All the previously discussed forms of political imagining have, in different ways, departed from the past or present to create or envision better futures. They are embedded in an understanding that the building blocks of tomorrow's society already exist in the present and are to some extent also shaped by past events. A different starting point is elaborated in dreams of the future that make a clear break with the existing inequalities and the everyday experiences of living in a society characterised by

racism, sexism and capitalism. Such freedom dreams envision the future as an empty space, cut out from the hierarchies of today's societies, and as a site for new ways of living together. These dreams reverse the temporality that proceeds from the past and present to the future to instead focus on the effects of future dreaming on the ways we act in the present. Such imaginings also explore how the present can be viewed in a different light when making an imagined future the starting point.

The artistic and activist project "We should all be dreaming" (WSABD) is developed by two Black Finnish feminists, writer-activist Maryan Abdulkarim and choreographer Sonya Lindfors. The first performances were organised in 2018 and, with the exception of a break during the Covid-19 restrictions, have continued since. WSABD events have been organised at art festivals and other cultural events in Finland, Belgium, the United Kingdom, Norway and the Netherlands. More-over, events have been directed at postethnic activists in Finland to enable collec-tive dreaming of a society beyond gendered, racial and class hierarchies. The initiators describe WSABD as "a concept that focuses on the radical potential of dreaming as a restorative and subversive practice."[3] They wish to promote "radical utopian dreams of common futures" by performances that gather people together to have dinner, discuss and listen to each other, and play with the idea of what a future world could look like, if the current hierarchies did not exist. The dinner was chosen as the format for encounters, as it is a widely shared practice for people to get together irrespective of racial, ethnic, gendered and class background.

In a radio interview with Maryan Abdulkarim and Sonya Lindfors about WSABD, they describe how the participants at the dinner are invited to discuss their dreams and thoughts about the future with a perspective of 40 years, 100 years and 1000 years (Rauhalammi, 2018). Each time period is rounded with a prepared talk that makes suggestions of how the world could look. Also present in the interview is activist and feminist politician Pazilaiti Simayijiang, who explains about the talk she has presented at the dinners about her dreams of the world in 40 years. By then, the world would have abandoned national borders in favour of a 'global union,' as well as stopped the climate change that threatens life on earth. She also envisions that instead of defence spending the money would be used for basic income and trainings on empathy. The topics discussed around future dreams include questions related to racism, nationalism and border regimes, but also move beyond these to imagine ways of living together that would enable caring for each other and nature, as well as rethinking working life and the economy beyond capitalist exploitation.

Abdulkarim and Lindfors have also written a dialogue that opens up (some of) the ideas behind the WSABD project. They address the need of dreaming and creating visions of a better future pro-actively, not just reacting to existing gen-dered, racialised and classed oppression. Struggles against these oppressions are part of many people's everyday lives, but dreaming can create spaces of freedom and enable a queering of the existing structures so that they look odd and out of place.

> S: I am dreaming of belonging and dreaming of a world that could include all of us. By the way, have you read Sylvia Wynter? If everything in the human

world is based on the notion that whiteness equals humanity, in order to move forward we should SHAKE EVERYTHING. EVERY. SINGLE. CON-CEPT. It's not about being good or bad, it's that everything is based on this hierarchical capitalist patriarchy. So you can't claim any position of being good or being feminist or being anti-racist as an excuse not to move.

M: Nothing about this system we are living is natural. Nothing about it is neutral.
(Abdulkarim and Lindfors, 2019, p. 61)

The activist-artists also ponder on the collectivity of dreaming and how the collective can be created. They address the need of being aware of the existing structural hierarchies, but still open to the possibility of dreaming for others and involving other people's perspectives in one's dreaming.

S: How to practice collective dreaming? And before we can dream collectively we have to somehow establish a "we"…

M: I guess we ask these questions without expectations of answers. We each dream, and having a platform to dream together allows us to negotiate between dreams. Your dream becomes mine, or at least I am a stakeholder in it, as I exist near you, with you in the same space, same community…
(Abdulkarim and Lindfors, 2019, p. 62)

The dialogue between Abdulkarim and Lindfors ends with two questions. The first opens up the future for imagining new formations: "What would the world be like after the struggles?" The second question returns from the future to imagine the present: "What would this moment be like without the struggles?" Thus, the imagination moves through the future and lands on a vision of the present. Instead of building on linear temporality, the imagining follows a hermeneutic spiral that moves from the future to the present and opens up space for a next circle towards the future.

The WSABD events are inspired by the words of Sun Ra, the late African-American jazz musician and thinker whose aesthetics has retroactively been discussed as Afrofuturism. The dinners also start with announcing the mission articulated by Sun Ra as: "The possible has been tried and failed. Now it's time to try the impossible!" Inspired by decolonial thinking and Afrofuturism, the aim of the project is to focus on creating social change and new ways of thinking, in order not to get stuck in the oppressive structures and cultural representations. The initiators also want to create spaces in which humour, "soft resistance" and a relaxed atmosphere allow for ways of being together that support learning from each other and dreaming together. My interpretation is that this reflects practices discussed as 'revolutionary love' in Chapter 5.

Several participants who have joined the WSABD dinners have commented on the difficulties of imagining the future in such an open way. In the previously mentioned radio programme, Pazilaiti Simayijiang interprets it as a question of not being open enough for the multiple possibilities and the creativeness involved in

the dreaming process. The risk of being stuck in the existing patterns of organising societies, economies and ways of living together is identified also in the research literature on the politics of imagination (Bottici, 2011; Latimer and Skeggs, 2011). However, I suggest that the experienced difficulties may also be related to the lack of the narrative model that other kinds of freedom dreams build on. Breaking the temporal order and departing from the future as an empty space, instead of seeing it as embedded in the present struggles and processes in the making, can be challenging for our thinking. At the same time, it can be a rewarding and fruitful way of moving beyond existing structures and systems of meaning.

In addition to WSABD events, individual and collective imagining has also been addressed in other Finnish antiracist feminist actions. The yearly #StopHatredNow event, which gathers cultural workers and activists to discuss questions of antiracism, feminism, intersectionality, whiteness and decoloniality, was organised with the theme of "Power and change" in 2018. A half-day session was reserved for themes related to future and dreaming, under the title "The future will be different." In this session, dreaming was the topic of a speech given by Carmen Baltzar, a documentarist and activist with Roma background. She also participated in a discussion panel titled "Future, dreaming and change," together with trans activist Panda Eriksson and Sámi politician Pirita Näkkäläjärvi. Both sessions commented on the difficulties of imagining other futures in the middle of everyday struggles, busy working life and voluntary work for human rights. Baltzar pointed out that societal structures create hindrances for racialised minorities to dream, since their history is largely made invisible and the centuries-old oppression of, for example, Roma people makes it difficult to envision an end to it. The lack of everyday safety is also draining and provides hindrances for dreaming. Nevertherless, Baltzar argued, this is exactly why dreaming is needed. Dreaming is about creating hope and resistance, as well as holding onto an alternative narrative in the midst of the exhausting everyday struggle for human rights.

Conclusions

This chapter has analysed the social imaginaries created in postethnic activism. It has built on the idea of the 'politics of imagination' (Bottici and Challand, 2011; Latimer and Skeggs, 2011) to grasp how postethnic activism involves a creative and transformative element. The chapter has argued that the activists are developing new social imaginaries through a focus on 'the past in the present' and 'the future in the present.' A large part of the 'freedom dreams' (Kelley, 2002) build on a narrative from the past to the present or from the present to the future, while a few also develop the full narrative temporality of past–present–future. In addition, some freedom dreams break the linear narrative and instead depart from the future to envision ways of living together that are not restricted by the current structures and systems of meaning. Such freedom dreams imagine the future as an empty space, which can be filled with meanings and hopes. The imagination can then return from the future to the present, enabling participants to see it in a different light and opening up new routes for politics.

The chapter has shown how the activist groups, through their events, connect global colonial and racial histories to the national histories of the Nordic countries and the diasporic lives of their families. The activists also organise activities through which national narratives are rewritten and belongingness reimagined in order to broaden the dominant notions built on white hegemony. In these actions, the activists creatively use their family histories, generational ties, local neighbourhoods, transnational travels and claims of belonging to reconfigure social imaginaries. The activities are based on a combination of past–present–future when engaging children, parents and grandparents to collect and document family histories, as well as to share stories in local school groups and digitally.

The chapter has also analysed how activities are built on the idea of 'intergenerational justice.' Instead of common ways of envisioning intergenerational justice as a goal that pits different generations against each other and views their interests as detached, the notions of social justice created by postethnic activists articulate these as connected to each other and beneficial for different generations. Activities that I have analysed as intergenerational justice have been developed by young people in order to claim rightful benefits for their parents who have worked hard most of their lives but due to cross-national histories and gender, race and class inequalities are left in poverty after their work career comes to an end. On the other hand, generational justice also refers to the commitment of parents to work for a more socially just future for their children.

Internationalist dreams and transnational solidarity are also part of the imaginaries created in postethnic activism. Not only the historical legacies of the trade of enslaved persons and colonialism, but also current struggles for social justice in the Global South, solidarity towards recently arrived migrants and work against the European border regime are important for postethnic activists. Dreaming of a society where race no longer matters and a world that is decolonised is an important motivation for many activists to continue to struggle and survive under racial capitalism.

Notes

1 www.iamqueenmary.com/ (accessed 27 July 2021)
2 The podcast series was also placed on the website of the commercial local radio station Radio Helsinki, which appeals especially to urban cosmopolitan young adults. www.radiohelsinki.fi/ohjelma/ruskeat-tytot/ (accessed 27 July 2021)
3 www.sonyalindfors.com/#/we-should-all-be-dreaming/ (accessed 14 October 2021)

9
CONCLUSIONS

Postethnic activism has pushed to place questions of race and racism at the centre of public discussions in the Nordic countries. In the context of racial nordicisation – a widespread ignorance of racial and colonial histories, and denials of present racism with reference to high achievements in gender equality and egalitarianism – it has provided profound challenges to hegemonic ways of understanding the nation, community and racelessness. At the same time, activists have sought to make sense of their own lives, to find connections to and create communities of belonging with others racialised as non-white, and to develop political agendas and visions that would lead to better futures. These two aspects are intimately intertwined, as the organising and articulation of views by those racialised as 'others' makes visible the existing white hegemony and the exclusionary national self-images of the Nordic countries. For the activists, however, the main motivation comes from the self-organising, autonomous agenda setting and creation of new representations of themselves and their communities.

Amongst the de-politicising tendencies of neoliberal capitalism that turn racial, classed and gendered inequalities into notions of individual failure and family responsibility, postethnic activism is engaged in a re-politicisation of questions of race, class and gender. The activists, their organisations and media sites question dominant understandings of the Nordic welfare states as the 'good' agents that guarantee equal rights to all their citizens and uphold trustworthy, well-functioning institutions. Instead, the activists make visible how everyday interaction, institutional practices and cultural representations are deeply embedded in normative whiteness and racist exclusions. They reformulate feminist and left-wing politics by indicating how race and racism intersect with gender, sexuality and class, as well as by pointing out the need to update political analyses to better grasp the reality of the increasingly diverse population in the Nordic societies. Urban activists resist the stigmatisation and criminalisation of their neighbourhoods, developing analyses of racial and class oppression and arguing for policies that take seriously the everyday

experiences of those marginalised by economic and political processes. Refusing to accept the individualising and pathologising frame through which migrants and racialised minorities are portrayed, the activists are arguing for structural explanations that centre power relations and the need for social change.

Postethnic activism and its radical potential

In this book, I have sought to develop both theoretically and empirically analyses that do not take as their starting point identity-based notions of activism. Instead of presuming a shared 'postethnic identity' (El-Tayeb, 2011) or arguing for the need for one collective identity, comparable to the British political blackness (Alexander, 2018; Narayan, 2019a), my argument is that the strength of postethnic activism lies in its multiple forms of organising and its internal differentiation. This allows for the articulation of experiences and analyses of oppressive structures that can form the basis of communities of belonging, in which the participants can feel at 'home.' The multiplicity of activism also makes it possible to move between communities of belonging, when no longer experiencing them as homely or when feeling at home in several communities. Postethnic activism enables multiple belonging – that is, participation in several communities of belonging that articulate the combination of political analysis and embodied experiences central for the activists. I argue that compared to an identity-based understanding that often becomes fixed on the division between the inside and the outside of the group, the perspective of multiple belonging and activism as an internally differentiated multitude opens up space for connectivity and coalition building. A search for one collective identity may become counterproductive to coalitional politics that is needed to dismantle racism and hierarchical structures, as it implies sameness and repression of differences. The erosion of the British political blackness (Alexander, 2018; Narayan, 2019a) from the 1980s onwards, when the neoliberal turn in racial capitalism and its differentiating logic gradually broke down earlier structures of solidarity, shows the vulnerability of all-encompassing collective identities and how racial capitalism can strengthen their tensions and discrepancies. Instead, mobilisation and movement building that acknowledge the centrality of differences and seek ways to connect across differences through shared political goals and activities are better equipped to tackle central societal challenges and combat the differentiating logic of neoliberal racial capitalism.

My analysis has identified five central forms of postethnic activism: (1) antiracist feminism and queer of colour activism, (2) urban activism in marginalised neighbourhoods, (3) Black and African diaspora activism, (4) Muslim activism addressing Islamophobia, and (5) Person of Colour activism. In addition to these, some less common ways of creating communities of belonging were found. Most of these were built on ideas of mixedness, in-betweenness or creolisation. While such forms of community building may not have mobilised (at least so far) as large groups as the five main forms, they have been important in addressing the border areas of racial categories and the processual nature of racialisation. All these communities of belonging are formed in action, building on a sharing of experiences and political analyses.

Moreover, the book has investigated the conditions for cooperation with other social justice movements. I argue that due to its border position that links antiracist, feminist and class politics, postethnic activism bears a central role in social justice politics. It can develop political agendas and social imaginaries that resonate beyond its own community of belonging and enable coalitions with other social movements to emerge. While it has not been possible to examine this kind of coalition building in detail in this book, the analysis provides examples of how, for example, social media is used to initiate and circulate campaigns with large visibility, even including international media coverage and transnational solidarity actions (see also Keskinen, 2021). Moreover, antiracist feminist activism has created coalitions with both other feminist movements and within the wider sphere of postethnic activism. Urban activism makes broad coalitions with local organisations in the marginalised neighbourhoods, as well as with some established art institutions and large NGOs. Postethnic activists are engaged in the 'multiplicities of resistance' in response to racial capitalism that require the building of "traditions that can respond and resist, and not at each other's cost" (Bhattacharyya, 2018, p. 184). This is not always an easy task but demands constant work with frictions and disagreements.

Engaging in racial politics in the context of racial nordicisation and hostile environment

Parts of postethnic activities are focused on supporting the well-being and self-care of racialised minority groups, building on the politics of survival (Collins, 2000; Bassel and Emejulu, 2018) in a racist and hostile society. Other postethnic activities are framed around the politics of social justice and the politics of revolutionary love that in different ways seek to change the whole society. While the first mentioned is focused on designing political agendas and targeted demands on increasing social justice, the latter involves the change of everyday relations and interactions in ways that promote non-hierarchical ways of being together and living a 'humanity under the skin' (Havlin, 2015).

All the five identified forms of postethnic activism seek to affect and change the racial politics of the societies in which they take place. In the context of racial nordicisation and the increasingly hostile political environment, participating in racial politics as a postethnic activist is fraught with the risk of racist harassment on social media, threats of violence and aggressive denials of the existence of racism. However, parts of mainstream media have provided space for the views of postethnic activists and the activists have developed their own communication channels, which allow them to frame their message in the way they prefer. The social media accounts and media platforms that postethnic activists and cultural workers have established are often aimed at racialised minority audiences. Nevertheless, they also function as 'counterpublics' (Squires, 2002; Kuo, 2018) that feed new questions and perspectives to other parts of the public sphere. Questions of whiteness, structural racism and the multiple forms of everyday racism that differently racialised groups experience have entered the coverage of mainstream media in especially Sweden and Finland. In

Denmark, the extremely hostile public environment has resulted in 'racial turns' and 'returns' (Danbolt and Myong, 2019) that aim to restore the hegemony of the race-lessness discourse and portray racism as individual incidents. While resistance towards the acknowledgement of racism as a central problem for Nordic societies is widespread also in Sweden and Finland, the insistence of postethnic activists on the relevance of these questions has resulted in a spread of public discussions on racism, intensified by the media attention on the Black Lives Matter demonstrations in 2020.

Nevertheless, it is too early to evaluate the full effect of recent postethnic activism on the racial politics of the studied Nordic countries. The activists are creating notions of belonging, history, nation and community that break with the taken-for-granted understandings and social imaginaries defined under racial nordicisation. In this book, I have identified several kinds of social imaginaries and future-oriented perspectives developed by the postethnic activists. These imaginaries connect interpretations of the past to the present and envision better futures. Parts of this politics of imagination connect to previous feminist, left-wing, anti-colonial and antiracist imaginaries, while arising from the everyday lives of the activists. Although it is not possible to thoroughly answer the question I posed in the introductory chapter – can the imaginaries created by postethnic activists, and to what extent, provide alternatives to the exclusionary nationalism and the (now embattled) liberal multiculturalism – I think the question is worth posing. It draws attention to the radical potential of postethnic activism and its capacity to create political visions of social change that bear relevance for the whole society. To what extent this may lead to actual social change depends on many things, not least the openness of other social justice movements to rethink their agendas and imaginaries. That the imaginaries created by postethnic activists in many ways connect with other radical social imaginaries and theoretical traditions, as well as opening up for coalition building, can work as building blocks for such change.

Navigating neoliberal logics and the differentiating processes of racial capitalism

In this book, I have also investigated the conditions of political activism in neoliberal times and under racial capitalism. The analysis has shown how post-ethnic activists navigate the neoliberal rationalities of individualisation and entrepreneurialism, which are especially visible in the media and cultural work context. Freelancing and other forms of precarious employment bring to the fore the differentiating logic of racial capitalism that divides both along racial hierarchies and among the racialised minorities. The media platforms established by postethnic activist-cultural workers face the choice between a search for funding from advertisers and other commercial actors or a development of activities based on voluntary work. The latter in most cases results in a heavy work load on top of the paid work that the activists need to do in order to make their living, which can in the long run hamper the activities. Some postethnic activists are able to find ways to combine activism with their paid

work or develop project-based activities. The activist-cultural workers are, however, not neoliberal subjects that would embrace the individualising and entrepreneurial logic of neoliberalisation. They actively question such logics and seek ways to work collectively even when it goes against the grain of common practices in the media and cultural work context. The activists have also engaged in (self-)critical discussions of the impact of consumer culture and commercialism on feminist, antiracist and leftist cultural and political work.

Neoliberalisation processes and navigating their effects take somewhat different forms in the marginalised urban neighbourhoods that are termed suburbs in Sweden and Finland and 'ghettos' in Denmark. These areas are designated as non-productive and marginal for capitalist accumulation by the dividing logic of racial capitalism. They are also stigmatised by mainstream media and targeted by law and order policies. Postethnic activists in these urban neighbourhoods struggle to make visible the neglect of local schools and welfare services, as well as to combat the outselling of public housing and plans of eviction resulting from governmental 'ghetto' policies. The issues of 'NGOisation' seem more complex than the picture portrayed in many critical studies on the effects of neoliberalisation. I have argued for an 'impure' and hybrid understanding of NGOs, which acknowledges the pro-fessionalisation and bureaucratisation of NGOs but also their capacity to support local postethnic activists in their work. In times when municipal and state actors are withdrawing from their responsibility to develop marginalised suburbs, public–private cooperation may also seem to be the only source of hope for activists who work for a better future for the residents in the marginalised neighbourhoods.

My analysis has also pointed out how some urban postethnic activists emphasise the work to strengthen individuals through the collective. This should not be interpreted as adaptation to neoliberal logic, but as a reflection of the impact of racial and class oppression on individuals and of seeking ways to counteract such processes. The col-lective is a tool for the strengthening of the individual and a means to initiate structural change. Collective organising in the marginalised neighbourhoods is the goal of many postethnic activists, which leads them to connect with many local organisations, ran-ging from ethnic and multicultural organisations to youth, parent and religious orga-nisations. The younger generation postethnic activists, thus, often have good networks in their localities and seek to strengthen the neighbourhoods on several levels.

The neoliberal turn of racial capitalism has certainly affected the conditions of radical social movements – amongst others postethnic activism. The differentiating logic of racial capitalism and the individualising trends of neoliberalisation provide challenges for activism. However, the effects do not seem as drastic as is envisioned in theoretical discussion on postracialism, postfeminism or postpolitics. Postethnic activists and other civil society actors are seeking ways to navigate neoliberal rationalities and the effects of neoliberal policies, as well as critically addressing such policies and developing political agendas to tackle the injustices created by racial capitalism. This book highlights the ongoing struggles for social justice and to create ways of living together that move beyond racial, class and gender hierarchies.

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