

"Do you
consent to
our care?"

From Racial Burden
to Black Feminist
Dreams

Noémi
Michel

Since the summer of 2020, when we witnessed intense mobilization for Black lives, anti-Black racism and decolonization have been trendy topics. In this context, media, universities, and state institutions have expected Black people to engage in the production of antiracist news and public brand images that are not centered in caring for Black lives. What would happen if, faced with these never-ending requests for unpaid and invisible labor, we could count on the care protocol offered by the Anonymous Society for Black Radical Care (ASBRC), an underground Black materialist feminist society? What would happen if, thanks to the ASBRC, we could better understand how racial burden and tokenism bear on our work? What would happen if, thanks to the care given by the ASBRC, we could cultivate our anti-capitalist Black liberation dreams? This text outlines some answers to these questions based on personal archives of emails, text messages and notes—real or made up.

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From: N.
To: R. et T.
Sent on: March 2022
Subject: My text

Dear editors,

Thank you for your trust and for this—remunerated (something still uncommon)—invitation to write a text within the framework of your stimulating thoughts and interventions on art practices and wages. I was planning on writing an essay, but I have been contacted by the Anonymous Society for Black Radical Care!!! ☺☺☺ I have given priority to my exchanges with them. With their consent, I am sending you an archive of our correspondence, a collection of text messages, emails, and personal notes that I have classified in several folders. I don't think there is much more to say. Maybe you could use the folders to create different sections?... I'll let you decide. I hope it works for you to

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publish this! I am going on holiday for 3 months. I hope you will be able to rest as well.

Warmly,
N.

1 Anonymous Society for Black Radical Care – Contact

Email correspondence extracted from N.'s
computer

From: ASBRC
To: N.
Sent on: February 2022
Subject: A message from the ASBRC

Dear N.,

How are you? We are the Anonymous Society for Black Radical Care. We are a secret, underground, plurilingual and global society created twenty years ago in a kitchen, around a dish of plantains, gumbo and griot that we cooked together to ward off our anger, our grief and our exhaustion. Our society was born from a burning awareness we all shared: Black people—especially Black women and non-binary people—get sick and die prematurely, taken away by isolation, daily stress, negligence, disgust, all too many conditions caused by working within or close to neon white.¹ organizations and institutions. We then defined our desires: to spot, alleviate, heal and repair the effects of violence on those who bear the mark of racial difference. Since then, we have been working, filled with love and joy, moved by the desire to open the lungs of those

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who lack air in this heavy atmosphere, thickened by colonialism's and slavery's afterlife. We want to ease their and our capacity to dream.

We envision our approach as revolutionary. It so happens that our vocabulary and our celebrity figures are currently very trendy. Let us thus specify that we are not interested in pompous anticapitalist declarations. Let us specify that we are not aligned with struggle entrepreneurs that seek visibility and contribute to the cooptation and deradicalization of our liberation philosophies. We do not buy the actions and statements of neon white institutions that only perform surface level recognition or reparation. We stay far from the "visible minorities" who mimic our oppressors.

We operate in disguise. We get back what was stolen and we reinvest it in caring for our people. We work towards undoing the violent effects of capitalism where they are lived. We do not pretend to be able to topple domination structures by ourselves. What matters to us is to protect and prolong our lives, our joys, our relationships and our dreams.

Do you consent to our care?

With warm solidarity,
The ASBRC

From: N.
To: ASBRC
Sent on: February 2022
Subject: Re: A message from the ASBRC

Dear ASBRC,

I dreamt of you and your email makes me realize you are real. Your work is vital. Thank you for seeing me. I know who you are and where you are.

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My boldest aspiration is to join you one day, to operate in disguise and help blur the structures that suffocate our people. I dream that I will, one day, reach a financial situation where I do not have to translate and sometimes even betray myself for the neon white institutions.

Receiving an offer to be taken care of is rare. I consent to your care.

Warmly,
N.

From: ASBRC

To: N.

Sent on: February 2022

Subject: Re: Re: A message from the ASBRC

Dear N.,

Your trust is precious; we know distrust has currently become crucial to cope with the heightened media coverage and exploitative use of the issues of colonialism and racism.

The situation has been alarming since 1492. Our ancestors have passed on to us the needles to unweave the violent knots restraining our people and weave back the fabric of our desirable futures, with passion and precision. Dispersed, we work towards finding and connecting to each other through space-time.

We have spotted you as one of ours.

We are sorry you have to experience racist violence. It is unfair. It is consuming. They tell themselves you are so strong so they do not feel bad. But we have seen your tears, your fears, your sleepless nights. We are here. Not far. We know that you know us, we know that you have spotted us,

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we know that you will never reveal where we are or who we are. We have your trust, you have ours.

We invite you to follow the SAHD protocol.

Spot. Alleviate. Heal. Dream.

We look forward to the joy of taking action for you and with you, for all of us.

Warmly,
The ASBRC

From: N.
To: ASBRC
Sent on: February 2022
Subject: Re: Re: Re: A message from the ASBRC

Dear ASBRC,
I am joyfully ready. Let's go!
N.

2 Anonymous Society for Black Radical Care – Care Protocol

Email correspondence extracted from N.'s
computer

From: ASBRC
To: N.
Sent on: February 2022
Subject: Spotting the mark we bear.

Dear N.,

History shows that Black women and non-binary people have always been seen as available and willing to do

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anything. "If I were not here, I would have to be invented" is how Hortense Spillers wrote about her subjective position of "a marked woman." Capitalist modernity has been shaped and is still fed by the constant appropriation of the flesh, the productive and reproductive forces, the creativity, the imagination, the lives of marked subjects.

We invite you to send us the archives of all interactions that have been heavy to bear. We invite you to spot the instances—all the messages and requests, all the ways you were addressed—when you felt like you were the one whose mark meant "she is at our service," but whose name everybody forgets.

In solidarity,
The ASBRC

From: N.
To: ASBRC
Sent on: February 2022
Subject: Re: Spotting the mark we bear.

Dear ASBRC,

As you know, I am an activist, I write and I teach about experiences of violence and resistance from a Black perspective. My work started around fifteen years ago and was mainly received with indifference by the mainstream media and the academic and state institutions. Then, in June of 2020, I was suddenly overwhelmed by requests from people that used to not give a damn about all this...

Here is a folder with 264 emails and a dozen text messages that I have received since the summer of 2020; since media, institutions and politicians "discovered" anti-Black racism... My interactions with the (mainly Swiss) media,

with the cultural, academic and museum institutions, with people that wanted to “meet for coffee” produced 264 emails! The requests are in French, German and English. I did not include all the exchanges I had within the scope of my activist work, given that I have chosen to do this work without compensation.

“Let’s face it, I am a marked woman, but not everybody knows my name.”² I know this sentence from Spillers by heart. The opening of her 1987 essay, “Mama’s Baby, Papa’s Maybe,” published not long after I was born. An announcement of our shared condition. Being a marked woman. Being marked by racial difference, branded. Becoming, undeniably, a mark, a brand. The brand that is put on me regardless of how much I protest: to be at the service of a message, a need, a “debate.”* Institutions want to buy this brand... at the lowest cost... at the cost of our health.

Just do it (but don’t complain).³

My name: misspelled. Myself: addressed with familiarity, barely valued, exchangeable with any other Black person... At first, I named this folder that I am sending over “requests” in my mailbox. I have recently renamed it “opportunities.” Whenever I file an email in this folder, I have a little chat with myself:

- You received yet another request.
- Great, people are finally getting interested in these issues!
- Beware of your enthusiasm: is it an interesting opportunity?
- You are right, my enthusiasm always gets me in trouble.
- Or is it a request that wants you to put yourself (again) at the service of the production of a resource that barely benefits the transformation desires you cultivate for this “us” you cherish? If the answer is “no,” decline politely.

There, I hand you over this folder of emails. I hand you the mark/brand I bear.

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Do not waste too much time reading them given it is almost always, with a few precious exceptions, the same request repeated with the same absence of care, the same vague information about the wage conditions for the labor they are asking for.

Warmly,
N.

* The debates shuffle between the following topics: Does racism exist in Switzerland? Are minorities going too far? Can we really talk about systemic racism? Is the police really racist? The African woman in our imagination. Decolonizing this and that. Freedom of speech and the "woke." Is it legal to have meetings that exclude white people?

3 Reporters and BLM – N.'s archives

Emails, extracted from N.'s computer

From: Reporter
To: N.
Sent on: June 2020
Subject: Participation to the radio show "X"

Hello!

X suggested I contact you. We would like to invite you to our radio show (...) this Wednesday to participate in a debate on our colonial past (and how to face it). It will be live from one of our studios. I remain at your disposal if you want to discuss it when you have a moment.

Best,
Reporter

Excerpt from N's personal notes

It's June 2020, I am grieving, I feel immensely sad for the Black deaths that have been all over the media. I am afraid for my people, exposed to violence and sensationalism. A reporter invited me to participate in a program on reparation and colonialism. I am getting roughly one request per day since the demonstration for Black lives happened in Geneva. It gathered more than 14,000 people!

I feel exhausted from having to deal with all these requests in parallel to the intense emotions we are experiencing as a community. I feel isolated at work. I feel like nobody cares. Not a single solidarity statement from my university (would I have wanted it to exploit our deaths though? I am not sure...). Not a single message from my colleagues to ask how I am doing.

I call the reporter like he asked me. We talk a bit about the topic, I get passionate and start developing a few points further. He stops me. He tells me he does not have a lot of time because he is mowing the lawn with his wife and she is waiting for him.

On the next day, I feel like I am on the verge of exhaustion, my chronic illness comes back. I call him to cancel. He is annoyed, he calls me back and makes me work for him, he wants me to find someone to replace me...⁴

My mother helps me phrase a generic answer to decline. I am going to copy-paste it in all my future text messages and emails. I want them to understand that our sadness is not here to increase their clicks online...

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Text messages extracted from N.'s mobile phone

June 2020

New voicemail

Duration 44s

Hello Reporter, I received your voicemail. I was wondering how you got this number, which I do not use professionally?

Hello, finding people's phone numbers to be able to get in touch quickly is part of my job. Whether they are researchers or state secretaries, actually. And Geneva is a village. The important thing is to be able to talk to each other, right? Best, Reporter.

Regarding your request, as I have already told several of your colleagues, my friends and relatives and myself, here and in the US, are directly affected by current events related to anti-Black racism. I am in an intense period of discussion and mutual care around this long-term struggle. I am therefore not available these days, but I will contact you later if I become more available. Thank you for your understanding and please use my email from now on. Good afternoon, N.

Hello again, noted, I will use your mail from now on (which I did without getting an answer). I wish you a good period of reflection. The TV show will take place this Wednesday. Best, Reporter.

Excerpt from N's personal notes

It is April 2021. After the June 2020 demonstration, I gave my time to local collective initiatives, full of hope and joy. In 2020: signed an open letter with 60 other Black cultural and art workers, demonstration on July 3rd, demonstration on October 31st. So that cultural institutions stop their surface-level antiracism; against police brutality; against the statue and the building name that honors a notorious racist from the University of Geneva; to get justice for Mike Ben Peter and other Black people killed by the Swiss police; against the federal removal center for asylum seekers. It continues in 2021. Last month, we demonstrated against the anti-burqa initiative. I feel like I am part of a local political radical coalition that is determined to make the lives inheriting colonial resistance matter.⁵ It is fulfilling. It is also a lot of work. My university colleagues organize fancy events around these issues but they do not come to the demonstrations... at least I never see them. I still get requests from the media. Things seem to be shifting. They suddenly realized the importance of “giving us a voice” when talking about racism... so it becomes a big tragedy if we are not available. The other day, a reporter lectured me after I canceled my participation because I was sick. Given that I was the “second woman specialist on this topic” to decline the invitation, he did not want to find himself with a panel made only of “older white males, especially given the topic.” As if my role was to make up for decades of ignorance and of prioritizing white voices, at the expense of my health...

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■ 4 Racial Burden – exchanges with the ASBRC

Telegram messages extracted from N.'s mobile phone

Hello N., it is the ASBRC,
Thank you for the emails, the text messages and the notes. We skimmed through them. While reading your archives, we wanted to suggest that you think of the mark/brand you bear in relation to what Maboula Soumahoro calls the racial burden. She writes: "For as unfavorably racialized people, we assume the exhausting task of explaining, translating, and rendering intelligible situations that are violent, discriminatory, or racist. Our responsibility is double: endure, and then delicately find a happy resolution to the aggressions and injustices we have suffered—both big and small. As unfavorably racialized people, we are called on to manage and to reassure the dominant class and its members. [...] And even when discussions about this inequality take place, the dominant group must be able to hold on to its sense of comfort, its privilege, its centrality. The comfort enjoyed by the dominant group must be maintained at all costs, notably by imposing silence." (It is in her book *Black is the Journey, Africana the Name*, p. 83).

Hello ASBRC,
Oh yeah, I have read this excerpt... yes it resonates. For me, the racial burden translates into a series of actions, a non-exhaustive list of verbs that all sound like dictates when faced with the neon white institutions: to self-translate, to translate, to reassure, to keep silent, to half speak, to support, to correct oneself, to justify oneself, to apologize, to doubt, to doubt oneself, to feel guilty, to be

afraid, to cry, to be enraged, to go crazy, to know nothing anymore, to be undermined, to censor oneself, to keep calm in anticipation, to step back, to quit, to withdraw, to run away... to come back, to get tired...

Hello again N.

A necessary step toward alleviating this burden is to be aware of it and to understand how it works. This is our analysis: you are inserted within two interrelated economical circuits that put an intense racial burden on you. First, you bear the racial burden as you involuntarily take part in the circuits that (re)produce the racialized and gendered label of “being human.” As a subject marked by racial difference, your existence is the ground for the constant reproduction of white supremacy. Indeed, whether you like it or not, your body is invested in the making of the “difference” brand that enables the “reference” brand (whiteness) to accumulate value. In other words, white people need to other you in order to keep on seeing, knowing and thinking about themselves as fundamentally human and therefore superior.

In this context, racial burden corresponds to all the gestures, the words, the emotions, the vital force we constantly have to carry out just to “be,” just to “be” in an environment that is rooted in the fiction that, in order to be human, one must be white. A fiction with very real effects.

For centuries, our traditions of thoughts have identified and fought against the effects of this labor to simply “be:” the double consciousness, the white mask, the racial burden, the mark... If we were not here, we would have to be invented... Our diasporic traditions expose the naturalization of the work underpinning the mere fact of living a Black life.

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Du Bois, Fanon, Soumahoro, Spillers, so many others...
Pressure. Burden. Crushing. Dead-end. Impossibilities.
Explosions. The fragments put together again by another
self. Unbearable heaviness of being...

N.,

We also need to talk to you about the second type of operation that puts a burden on you. You bear the racial burden when you engage in "dialogues" imbued with the encounter fetishism of western political culture. Western capitalist societies, in order to be labeled as "liberal democracies," need to distance themselves from so-called "obscurantist" societies. Creating such a label involves the proliferation of face-to-face intersubjective situations such as dialogue, "togetherness," or encounters. Maintaining this label requires the vilification of alternative political ways of organizing such as "communautarisme"⁶ or "closed meetings." We are forced to engage in the economy of relationships and encounters required by our societies' institutions and organizations. And as marked subjects, we have to provide extra labor that is ignored and even denied by dominant subjects. It is a sophisticated work of risk assessment: every time we are "invited," we have to probe, anticipate, dread and fear the more or less secure parameters of our upcoming proximity with the dominant subjects. Is it a trap? Are they going to really listen? Do they want to meet me to better tame me? Why should I go have this coffee? And if I go, will I be able to truly be myself? Will I have to put in effort to be a "respectable" and "polite" person so that I can be heard?

In the asymmetrical relationship situation sold to us as the fiction of democratic dialogue, we have to use a

polite and polished language, we have to make sure we do not disrupt the white sense of comfort too much, we have to evaluate on the spot the risk of being put back in our place or kicked out, we have to think very carefully before speaking...

Your thoughts inspire me! So, we could say we bear a plurality of racial burdens. It is crazy how much time it takes from us. It is a labor that is invisibilized, negated and misunderstood. It is like a bad investment we are forced to make. You bet on the wrong horse (white supremacy) but you cannot withdraw your bet. You are the witness to your waste of energy.

Preach N.!⁷

Yes, it is a forced mis-investment. Unless you decide to live outside the existing structures. These racial burdens go against the desirable work of care and attentiveness that is needed to undo the effects of centuries of racial violence. All caught up in self-justification, exhaustion, management of perpetual trauma, we do not have any energy left to heal and dream.

■ 5 Academics and Decolonization – N.’s archives

Excerpt from N’s personal notes

June 2020. 14,000 people in the streets of Geneva. Unprecedented media coverage of racism. Statues toppled in Europe. The university is my main place of work. Yet I don’t find my place to do the work. My university has chosen silence.

A PhD student from another university invites me to a roundtable with “civil society” actors on the issues and

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implications of the Black Lives Matter movement in Switzerland. Her intentions are laid out carefully and precisely. She does not mention any wage, only that traveling and food costs will be covered. In academia, it is totally usual to organize discussions on "social issues" that take a heavy toll on certain people, sometimes even costing them their lives, without paying them. Most often, when you ask for a salary, when you specify that you do not have a secure job, you are told that you should give your time for free in the name of "serving society"... Most often, those who understand and try to find a solution to free labor are not the ones who decide.

At the university, Black lives are buffeted between indifference and exploitation.

Emails extracted from N.'s computer

From: N.

To: Academic

Sent on: July 2020

Subject: RE: invitation to participate in a roundtable

Dear Academic,

Thank you for your email, I am trying my best to be OK in this particularly intense period. I hope you are doing well.

Thank you for the invitation. I consider myself both a researcher and a civil society actor against anti-Black racism.

I would be very interested in participating in this roundtable. Although instead of being invited for a meal, I would prefer to receive a fee. I would also be interested in knowing if the other people invited will also be paid? Thanks to my extensive reading of Black feminist authors

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and their approach to labor, I have developed a specific position regarding payment for the antiracist and antisexist work of people directly affected by these issues. I have decided that, for political reasons, I would no longer work for free in the context of institutions that have the means to pay and that have been built, historically and structurally, on the exploitation of subaltern labor.

What does your research group think about this?

Thank you for your understanding,

Best regards,

N.

From: Academic

To: N.

Sent on: August 2020

Subject: RE: RE: invitation to participate in a roundtable

Dear N.,

I am getting back to you regarding the Black Lives Matter roundtable I wanted to organize this coming semester. After checking in with my research group, it appeared that we can only pay external contributors if they have a precarious academic status (= no position). I would have liked to ask for an exemption to be able to pay everyone participating in the roundtable, but this option has not been collectively approved. I have therefore decided to cancel the event.

I hope we will be able to meet again some other time and I wish you a good summer,

Best regards,

Academic (PhD student)

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Excerpt from N's personal notes.

July 2020. I would like to rest. Take time off. I am going to Berlin for a few days with the person with whom we have recently started to tell our love to each other. Our relationship is full of joy, including the joy that comes from our shared commitment to our people. Sometimes, I am afraid one of us will disappear early, taken away or made sick by violence. My mailbox and my mobile phone are bursting. One of my colleagues gave my private number to an institution without asking. Some academics want me to write a "blog post" article on Black Lives Matter for their platform aimed at Swiss higher education institutions, they are asking me to forward their call for contribution to "people concerned" by racism... I do not like this euphemism... who is not concerned by racial and colonial violence?

Emails extracted from N's computer

From: N.

To: Academic

Sent on: July 2020

Subject: Re: Black Lives Matter article

Hello,

Thank you for your interest in my work.

Before I answer your request—both on writing something and on transferring your call to other people—I would like to better understand your intentions and the material conditions behind this endeavor. I have a few questions to ask you if I may.

Why do you want to make visible the work of people actively involved in Black Lives Matter? How will your plat-

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form take steps to put pressure on higher education institutions in Switzerland so that they take seriously the issue of systemic racism, particularly in academia?

The intellectual and political antiracist labor of people affected by racism is most of the time unpaid or very unstable in Switzerland. Paradoxically, many collectives and Black researchers are currently being overwhelmed by requests to work extra for the education of a public that is barely aware of these issues. How do you take this into account? Do you plan on paying for the blog posts?

Thank you in advance for your answers!

Best regards,
N.

From: Academic

To: N.

Sent on: July 2020

Cc: Academic

Subject: Re: RE: Black Lives Matter article

Hello,

Thank you for your reply and for the highly relevant questions it raises. (...)

We have two reasons to ask for posts on racism in academia right now: to follow the news, which is one of the purposes of our blog, and to confront insidious racism that prevails in academic settings.

For us, it seemed obvious that we should ask people that are both specialists of and affected by racism. Of course, we could ask a white professor who would probably deliver a very interesting theoretical article, but we find this as absurd as asking a man to write about sexism.

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Regarding potential pressure we could place on the institution, I am afraid I will disappoint you. (...)

We are not in a position to put pressure on anyone. Instead, our work aims at raising awareness amongst our users, giving a platform to the struggles and their actors, and starting a debate. (...)

The dictate of free labor, often expected in activism, is also present [in our field]. Unfortunately, our financial situation does not allow us to pay for the posts we publish, but we will take your criticism into account and consider allocating a budget for this in our next financial planning. I hope I answered your questions and I remain at your disposal for any additional information.

Best regards,
Academic

Excerpt from N's personal notes

February 2022. I adore the Anonymous Society for Black Radical Care! Since we started our correspondence, I feel more confident. My vision is clearer. Our discussions on racial burden made me realize the importance of always orienting our actions towards repairing and caring for the lives that are most affected by the weight of colonialism.

One of my students, S., just defended a powerful thesis on the experience of racism in the university. She wrote it collectively, together with other students marked as racially different. Their findings are damning. Racism is everywhere. Their dreams are powerful. They talk about classes operating differently, algorithms to search bibliography that would give access to non-western writings, un-whitening faculty... Their approach resonates with a

Swiss German student collective who organized amazing action days for racial justice.

Collectives of Black students and students of color give me hope. But they are also “fresh flesh” for the organizers of fancy academic events. They invite them for cheap, then they can say that they have “given them a voice” and it adds “colors” to their pictures...

Swiss German academics invite me and my student for a series of public conferences aiming at “decolonizing universities.” Inspired by the ASBRC, after checking in with S., I suggest I would step aside and give the 300 chf fee. Instead, I propose that they invite S. and her collective and provide infrastructure and funds for a meeting between students marked as racially different. They do not seem to understand our proposition, or they pretended not to. They want to maintain what was initially planned. They specify that 150 people are already registered to the conference. It looks like they do not want to lose this audience. We insist on (re)explaining our vision. This costs us a dozen emails.

Emails extracted from N.'s computer

From: N.

To: Academics

Cc : S.

Sent on: February 2022

Subject: Re: Re: Re: Lecture Series “Decolonize...”

Dear Academics,

We specified our vision in our first email. In the context of a session devoted to the empowerment and organization of racially minoritized students, we are not interested in

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giving a "public lecture" format but in an evening encounter led by S.'s collective for BIPoC (Black Indigenous and People of Color) students only. We are convinced that decolonizing universities means, in priority, providing resources for BIPoC students. Let us know if you are interested in the terms of our proposition, in case you are not, we don't feel comfortable taking part in the public lecture series.

All the best,
N. and S.

From: Academics
Sent on: March 2022
To: N.
Cc : S.
Subject: RE: Lecture Series "Decolonize ..."

Dear N. and S.,

Thanks for clarifying again your vision for the session. We will cancel the public event for that day and instead facilitate this workshop and look forward to it taking place (...).

Also, we are trying to see whether we can organize a parallel meeting/workshop/discussion for people who are not affected by racism to reflect on their privileges at the university to take place at the same time you are holding the workshop. We hope we can make it happen despite our limited time, capacity, and funding, but we'll definitely try.

All the best,
Academics

6 Tokenism – exchanges with the ASBRC

Telegram messages extracted from N.'s mobile phone

Hello ASBRC,

Our exchanges on the concept of racial burden were really stimulating. I wanted to share with you my notes on tokenism which, as I see it, is one of the sources of this burden.

As defined by the Oxford English Dictionary, tokenism is “the practice of making only a perfunctory or symbolic effort to do a particular thing, especially by recruiting a small number of people from underrepresented groups in order to give the appearance of sexual or racial equality within a workforce.” (<https://en.oxforddictionaries.com/definition/us/tokenism>, consulted on 04/01/2022)

Looking at this definition, it seems to me that tokenism can be associated with what marketing has referred to as branding. In order to improve its brand image, an organization will appropriate and exploit the image of people marked as racially different through technologies of audiovisual representation such as posters, Instagram squares, out of context short quotations, video clips, photography exhibitions, names... The aim is to produce the look of equality, inclusion or diversity for the outside world. However, this does not equate to any commitment from the organization to improve the condition of people suffering from racial capitalist violence within it... I think it is perverse...

Hello N.,

Thank you for sharing! Within our Black feminist materialist approach, we could think of the token as an exchange currency. Your body adds value to the institution's image. The institution appropriates the signs of “visible diversi-

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ty” that can be read on your body surface (your complexion, your hair, your features, how you are built, how your name sounds and so on...). It appropriates your image by exposing it on its many audiovisual communication channels. Your body becomes a visual token.

Exactly. They want our bodies on display, but if we cannot be there, if we get suddenly sick, we are reprimanded... or we are asked to find another token, fast... they want our image, but everything becomes complicated when we ask for a decent fee... They want our presence but most of the time they don't give a damn about how we feel...

I would like to share with you some further notes, also on tokenism.

Tokenism has also been associated with computing and data security. In this context, to tokenize is defined as “substitut[ing] a randomly generated identifier for (a sensitive piece of data) in order to prevent unauthorized access.” <https://en.oxforddictionaries.com/definition/tokenize>. The token, appointed to a specific place, gives security, prevents access to sensitive data. The token is a trick to keep something sensitive out of reach. To tokenize means to contain, to put elements in a container, to encrypt access to this container while creating the false belief that the elements are still available.

These last couple of years, I have observed that the institutions and organizations which define themselves as “feminist” love to quote Black feminists and invite them often. This idolization is not done with care. They cite us without seriously reading us, without putting into context what we say, without really listening. They invite us but do not put us in touch with one another. While they make stars of some of us, they ask others to moderate discussions with little retribution, to make coffee or to replace someone on the spot...

They make us talk without taking responsibility for the implications of what we say. In reality, they “give us a voice,” they “give us visibility” all while disciplining and controlling us. In reality, their idolization allows them to contain and suppress the transformative strength and the radicality of our positions and demands. In fact, they make sure we stay in precarious working situations, they micromanage us. In fact, when they have a power of decision, solidarity vanishes from their repertoire, suddenly they do not love us anymore.

In short, tokenism is rooted in the exploitation of our bodies and our voices. It allows these institutions and organizations to broadcast a cool sound towards the outside world, to establish themselves as progressive and trendy frequencies all while making sure our voices do not cause any trouble inside.

Exactly N.! Your voice becomes a token-voice. An acoustic exchange currency. The sound of equality, inclusion, diversity that can be heard as coming from the organization. But the organization does not really listen to you. It does not take responsibility when faced with what you express, what you ask for.

Tokenism benefits dominant groups that populate tokenizing organizations. The latter in turn increase their capital in the global market of institutions and organizations that compete for the “progressive”, “likeable”, “in tune with their times” labels. The Black and subaltern traditions of knowledge are appropriated and distorted, depoliticized and sweetened so that they cannot cause trouble, so that comfort is preserved, so that the elite club of deciding leaders is perpetuated.

I think about tokenism. I think about racial burden. I burn with anger. I remember the times where I innocently believed

"Do you consent to our care?"

I was being invited to share and build on the knowledge traditions that feed our dreams of liberation. I burn with anger. The violence of the neon white devices that eat up beauty and love coldly burns me. I also know that, as we wrote in one of our speeches with the *Faites des Vagues* collective, our knowledge and our memories shine.

📁 7 Anonymous Society for Black Radical Care – 2022 draft of the Radical Care Manifesto

Excerpt from a Framapad, N.'s computer

We are the Anonymous Society for Black Radical Care.

Our care protocol builds upon our struggles and our centuries-old resistance tactics. For a long time, we have been marching and chanting the names of our people. For a long time, we have been taking care of our tears, our fears, our joys with rich and varied ancestral rituals.

Our care protocol updates a long history of dreams and resistance. We adapt to the ever changing dynamics of the perpetual appropriation of our hearts and bodies. Since the murder committed by Derek Chauvin, killer policeman, our energies have been intensely absorbed by a circuit that we define as bloodsuckingly perverse.

Institutions, companies and public figures exploit the outrage sparked by the loss and disregard of Black lives to manufacture their brand image. This outrage needs to feed on a fresh supply of Black flesh and brains to be displayed on social media, magazine covers, roundtables, as keynote speakers in a conference or as a bibliographic reference. A display to maintain the illusion of proximity. This proximity with Black flesh and brains is a commodity that increases the capital of said organizations, institutions and companies. Once the lifeblood is sucked out of them for cheap, the

flesh and brains are abandoned. We are left behind with no remaining energy and, often, full of regrets for having participated in this farce that upholds the status quo. Those of us that expose the farce and our accomplices that try to get out of line are always at risk of being dazzled by a neon white light sustained by denial, negligence, threats, fragility, dismissal. Racial burdens, functions of colonialism, slavery and their afterlife, constantly reconfigure themselves and make our head spin. To be as to be in service of. To be in service of the service that hides the exploitative reality of being in service of. Perverse bloodsucking. Tokenism. Racial burden. Operations and consequences of the maintenance of global racial capitalism.

A list of words to never forget, a list of verbs to prioritize: to organize collectively, to take care, to repair injustice, to listen, to heal, to cry with, to walk with, to walk for, to archive, to remember, to commemorate, to remind, to avenge, to un-erase, to correct, to give back, to legitimize, to quote, to reference, to hug, to sing with, to honor, to grieve, to celebrate, to love... When we chant these verbs, we temporarily perceive what it might mean to live a life alleviated from racial burden and tokenism... temporarily..

We are working to stretch this temporary. This is the purpose of our Society.

We are the Anonymous Society for Black Radical Care.

■ 8 Black Radical Care Protocol – to heal – to dream.zip

Excerpt from N.'s personal notes and pictures

May 2022. We gathered. We dream together.

Translation: Amal Achaibou

"Do you consent to our care?"

Notes

1. Note from R., one of the editors: "I did not know this expression, I love it!" The author's answer: "We came up with this during internal discussions with the collective *Faites des Vagues* which I am a part of. We were trying to find a way to name instances where logics of authority and negligence bound to structural whiteness are bluntly exposed. I suggested "neon white," another member said "ivory white" to link whiteness with this colonial commodity made scarce, ivory (shout out to Inès!). The elitist institutions of our Western European states are all neon/ivory white. They are all organized around the perpetuation and protection of structural whiteness..."

2. In English in the original text.

3. In English in the original text.

4. In a previous version of this text, I had inserted the following comment: "People contacting me would systematically reveal their obvious disconnection from my community with the question 'Could you give me other names?' Google has existed since 1998." R., one of the editors, suggested I add some nuance with the following comment: "I have a mixed feeling [in English in the original text] about this because, even though it represents extra work to give names, in the case of an interesting project where you would not be able to participate, and only in that specific case, I think it would be cool to give the names of people that can replace you, in particular people marked as racially different that have less opportunities and visibility than you. If you are declining the invitation because it is completely missing the point, of course it should not be passed on to someone else from your community." This nuance is important, but sometimes the invitation lays in a grey zone, neither interesting nor missing the point, and in that case I always wonder "should I investigate so that someone else can benefit from it? Do I have the energy for this?"

5. Below are the links with the archives of the speeches, open letters, statements and calls for demonstration that have fueled the commitment for Black and racialized lives in the French-speaking part of Switzerland:

Noëmi Michel

[instagram.com/faites_des_vagues](https://www.instagram.com/faites_des_vagues)
outragecollectif.noblogs.org
facebook.com/aquiletouroff
[instagram.com/collectifkiboko](https://www.instagram.com/collectifkiboko)
blackartistsinswitzerland.noblogs.org
[instagram.com/collectifamani](https://www.instagram.com/collectifamani)
stop-racial-profiling.ch
lesfoulardsviolets.org
bds-info.ch
solidaritetattes.ch
[instagram.com/luttedesmna](https://www.instagram.com/luttedesmna)
[instagram.com/blmgeneva](https://www.instagram.com/blmgeneva)
[instagram.com/reflexion_decoloniale](https://www.instagram.com/reflexion_decoloniale)
facebook.com/coll.memoire.ne
[instagram.com/racialjusticestudentcollective](https://www.instagram.com/racialjusticestudentcollective)
collectifjeandutoit.wordpress.com
facebook.com/NetzwerkBlackShe
caferevolution.ch

(All these links were consulted on 01/04/2022)

6. T.N.: In francophone European contexts, “communautarisme” is an expression used to criticize if not criminalize forms of collective organization based on ethnic and racialised belonging. “Communautarisme” is often opposed to “universalisme,” which is implicitly the attribute of the white community.

7. In English in the original text.

Tout ce qu'on tait on sait
We Know What Remains Unsaid

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