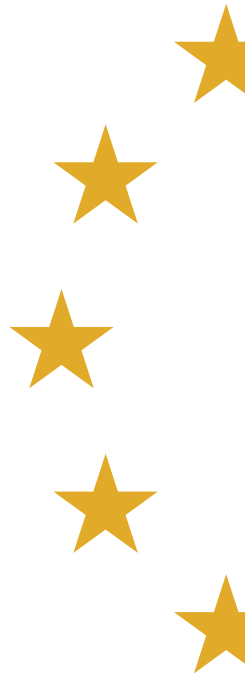


DeZIM Research Notes +

DRN #06 | 21 Berlin, July 2, 2021

Black Lives Matter in Europe

Transnational Diffusion, Local Translation and Resonance of Anti-Racist Protest in Germany, Italy, Denmark and Poland



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Black Lives Matter in Europe

Transnational Diffusion, Local Translation and Resonance of Anti-Racist Protest in Germany, Italy, Denmark and Poland

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ABSTRACT

The violent death of George Floyd caused by a police officer on May 25, 2020 in Minneapolis, MN, has not only sparked mass mobilizations in the United States, but also led to an unprecedented diffusion of “Black Lives Matter” protests in Europe. Floyd’s death served as a catalyst for civil society actors to more broadly denounce police violence and racism. This Research Note presents the findings of an empirical pilot study, comparing the scope, localization and resonance of Black Lives Matter protests in Germany, Italy, Denmark and Poland. Based on newspaper content analysis and qualitative interviews with protest organizers, the findings document differences in the scope and geographical reach of BLM protest activity, but also similarities in its unprecedented mobilization capacity among Black and PoC activists who had no previous protest experience or established ties to social movements.

Keywords: Black Lives Matter; protest; anti-racism; Europe; social movements

ZUSAMMENFASSUNG

Der gewaltsame Tod von George Floyd durch einen Polizisten am 25. Mai 2020 in Minneapolis löste eine Protestwelle in den USA aus, die kurze Zeit später auch nach Europa und in andere Weltregionen überschwappte. Floyds Tod diente als Katalysator für eine beispiellose Diffusion von „Black Lives Matter“-Protesten und als Anlass, Polizeigewalt und Rassismus zu skandalisieren. Diese Research Note präsentiert Ergebnisse einer empirischen Pilotstudie, in der Umfang, Form und Resonanz von BLM-Protesten in Deutschland, Italien, Dänemark und Polen in den Blick genommen wurden. Auf Grundlage inhaltsanalytischer Auswertungen von Zeitungsberichten sowie qualitativen Interviews mit Protestorganisator*innen dokumentieren die Daten markante Unterschiede in der Größe und geographischen Ausdehnung der Proteste, jedoch auch Ähnlichkeiten in ihrer Mobilisierungskapazität von jungen Schwarzen und PoC-Aktivist*innen ohne vorherige Protesterfahrung oder Verbindungen zu sozialen Bewegungen.

Schlagwörter: Black Lives Matter; Protest; Antirassismus; Europa; Soziale Bewegungen

¹ All authors have contributed equally to this Research Note.

KEY FINDINGS

- The violent death of George Floyd caused by a police officer on May 25, 2020 in Minneapolis, MN, has not only sparked mass mobilizations in the United States but also led to an unprecedented diffusion of “Black Lives Matter” protests in Europe. Floyd’s death served as a catalyst for civil society actors to denounce police violence and racism more broadly.
- Based on newspaper content analysis and qualitative interviews with protest organizers, this Research Note presents findings of an empirical pilot study comparing the scope, localization and media resonance of Black Lives Matter protests in Germany, Italy, Denmark and Poland.
- The protests have resonated differently in scope and form in European countries. For Italy, Denmark and Germany, our data document a wide geographical reach of the protests, which spread to both large cities as well as small towns and attracted thousands of participants, many of them first-time protesters. In Poland, in contrast, resonance was limited, with only few and small protest events.
- The protests in Europe differed in nature: Globally relevant anti-racist frames interacted with national cultures of protest and domestic debates, including issues such as post-colonialism, anti-fascism, protest against police brutality and solidarity with ethnic and racialized minorities.
- We find, on the one hand, a clear reference to the U.S. context, signaled by the shared use of English slogans, including “I can’t breathe” and “Black Lives Matter”, the “silent demonstrations” that refer to the duration of Floyd’s agony, and the frequent demonstrations in front of U.S. embassies.
- On the other hand, we document varying degrees of frame bridging and modification that adapted anti-racist messages to the local contexts. Activists in both Italy and Denmark made regular connections to the fate of refugees and migrants; the German and Italian protests emphasized structural racism in their respective societies; with the exception of Poland, protesters related their anti-racist protest to their countries’ colonial past.
- We document an extensive media coverage of BLM protests in Germany, Denmark and Italy, giving activists, and in particular Black activists, and racialized or religious minorities, an unusual platform to express their grievances and demands. In these countries, BLM protests have in this way animated public discussions on racism and politicized the issue to an unprecedented degree.
- The protests led to the creation of new organizations and alliances within the anti-racist movements in all countries. Though to varying degrees, the protests were both publicly spirited and sought to strengthen awareness, consciousness and emotional bonds, while unfolding a strong empowering effect on Black activists and racialized minorities more broadly.

1. Introduction: Transatlantic Echoes of Black Lives Matter

The movement network “Black Lives Matter” (BLM) was initiated by three Black women in 2013 following the acquittal of the man who killed the Black teenager Trayvon Martin in Sanford, Florida. Under the banner of ‘Black Lives Matter,’ the network built upon and connected new and old activist initiatives working to achieve racial justice for Black people in the U.S. Since then, BLM mobilized around instances of police brutality against Black men and women in the U.S., often resulting in waves of protests (Lowery 2017). The network heavily utilized social media sites, particularly twitter and Facebook, where activists articulated their claims and mobilized activists. The hashtag #BlackLivesMatter united all those supporting the campaign and its united fight against racism. This digital infrastructure became critical when the movement later mobilized under COVID conditions. From the beginning, the mobilization included calls for activists to utilize disruptive tactics, as well as to engage in institutional politics through means such as voting and running for office (Tillery 2019). Until recently, most of the protest events were limited to the U.S. However, this changed with the killing of George Floyd in 2020. His violent death caused by a white police officer in Minneapolis on May 25 set off a massive wave of protests in the U.S., and soon beyond. In many countries worldwide, Floyd’s death served as a catalyst for civil society actors to widely denounce police violence and racism. In 2020, the BLM protests diffused transnationally, quickly and widely (Tharoor 2020), and were echoed by large-scale mobilizations in various European cities (Nossiter & Méheut 2020). Yet the protests have resonated differently in scope and form in various European countries. While the protests worldwide were kindled by a sense of indignation and solidarity with the movement in the U.S., they were also more than acts of solidarity. In all countries that we studied, the local networks of activists ‘translated’ the anti-racist frames from the U.S. context to their own local cultures and issues. Globally relevant anti-racist frames interacted with national cultures of protest and domestic debates, including issues such as post-colonialism, anti-fascism, protest against police brutality, and solidarity with ethnic and racialized minorities, leading to varying forms of protest events and framing.

Against this backdrop, a pilot project (project duration: Sept. 1–Dec. 31, 2020) at the German Center for Integration and Migration Research (DeZIM), funded in the context of an emerging national monitoring of racism and discrimination (NaDiRa) by the German Ministry of Family Affairs, Senior Citizens, Women and Youth (BMFSFJ), has investigated the scope and resonance of BLM protests in Europe. The project involved researchers at DeZIM, the Scuola Normale Superiore in Florence, the University of Copenhagen, and the Polish Academy of Sciences. Identifying patterns of transnational diffusion and comparing anti-racist protest across four European countries, we explored the role of protest in anti-racist agenda-setting. This research is thereby adding to an international body of scholarship which has studied the relevance of cross-border protest diffusion and the local translation of globally contentious issues (della Porta & Tarrow 2005; Soule 2015). While this is an integral part of social movement scholarship, transnational diffusion, local translation and the impact on national agenda setting have rarely been discussed as regards anti-racist protest (Fella & Ruzza 2013). We argue that looking at anti-racist actions from a purely national perspective leaves important transnational processes underexplored. The responses to Floyd’s death in Europe constitute a very good case in point.

The project compared the wave of protests and civil society reactions in four European countries – Germany, Italy, Denmark and Poland – which represent different European regions with a range of sociopolitical legacies and experiences of racism. Thus, we included two post-fascist states (Germany and Italy), one post-socialist state (Poland), and three post-colonial states (Germany, Italy and Denmark). Moreover, the countries vary markedly with regards to the organization of civil society, the level of politicization of racism in the public sphere, and the forms of racism in each society, thus providing a fruitful basis for comparative analysis. The project focused on the following three research questions:

1. What responses and reactions of civil society took place in the four European countries? How can cross-national differences be explained? (mapping and contextualizing anti-racist protest)
2. How have anti-racist activists in Europe adapted frames, claims and strategies of the U.S. protests to their respective national contexts? (transnational diffusion and localization of anti-racist protest)
3. What narration of anti-racist protests can we observe in national public discourses? (discursive impact)

To answer the three core research questions about the scope and forms of anti-racist protest, their transnational interdependencies, and national discursive/agenda setting impacts, the project consisted of three work packages, each of which deployed a specific method. First, we systematically mapped the protest activity in the four countries over a period of eight weeks following the death of George Floyd, looking at forms, organization and the framing of the protests, and relying on different types of sources.² Second, we used qualitative interviews with key informants and protest organizers (six per country) to study the paths of cross-national protest diffusion, including the local translation of frames and strategies, as

well as locating the protests within the anti-racist movements in the four countries. The third work package on protest resonance in public debates was based on a qualitative content analysis of leading national newspapers.

Finally, a note about language is due. We studied Black Lives Matter mobilizations in diverse national and cultural contexts. Accordingly, there are different traditions and unique histories around race, racialization and racism that shape different language usage. In the same way, unique movement traditions lead to different language choices in the different countries we studied. In this paper, we chose to respect the preferred language choices of the activists in each specific national context. As a result, the terminology around categories of race and ethnicity differs across the different country reports.

In the following section, we present our findings on the Black Lives Matter protests in Europe in early summer 2020. Given the short project duration and timeframe of analysis, the project provides a first analysis of a particular historical moment and needs to be complemented with analyses of more long-term impacts. Below, we first provide an integrated description of national patterns and developments separately, followed by a comparative discussion of the cross-national patterns and an overview of avenues for future research.

² For more detailed information on the methodology, see separate box.

2. Methodology

Protest Mapping

In order to map all relevant protest events that took place in each country between May 26, 2020 and July 30, 2020, we performed a variant of “protest event analysis” (Hutter 2014). We conducted a search using the basic but inclusive string “Black Lives Matter OR BLM AND [name of country]” in three types of sources: 1. Google search engine, 2. Social media and website publications of movement organizations, 3. National and regional newspapers. When relevant, we added specific state, region, or city names to the search phrase in order to generate more inclusiveness in the search. We gathered additional data on protest events during our interviews with activists.

Interviews

To learn more about the framing and structure of the movements, we conducted interviews with six key actors from each country. In selecting our interviewees, we paid particular attention to factors such as geographical distribution in the respective countries, makeup of organizers in terms of personal background and belonging to racialized groups, and diversity of organizational types. Mirroring the constitution of the distinct organizational structures of BLM protest in each country, interlocutors were predominantly young Black female activists in Germany and Italy; in Denmark, interviewees included a diverse age range of male and female identified activists, mostly coming from Black, Muslim, immigrant and ethnic minority organizations; in Poland, we interviewed first-time organizers and experienced leaders of social movement organizations; in most cases, they were white and Polish citizens. We made use of our long-term familiarity and relationships in the field of anti-racism mobilization to gain initial access to interviewees, and used snowball techniques to recruit additional interviewees. The interviews were carried out between November 2020 and January 2021, predominantly as virtual interviews due to COVID-19-related restrictions. We followed harmonized, semi-structured interview protocols across all countries, and transcribed or summarized all interviews. A list of interviews can be found in the Appendix.

Newspaper Content Analysis

Finally, we conducted discourse analyses of relevant newspaper articles. Given the differing amounts of relevant content in national news media in the four countries under analysis, this work package differed in its scope and methodological implementation across the four cases.

- In Germany, we scrutinized newspaper coverage of protest events in five leading national newspapers with different political leanings and editorial stances: on a continuum from liberal to conservative media, we selected *Die Tageszeitung (taz)*, *Süddeutsche Zeitung (SZ)*, *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung (FAZ)*, *Die Welt*, and the tabloid *BILD*. We limited the timeframe of our analysis to the coverage of two protest events. First, we focused on the largest, decentralized BLM protests taking place in cities around Germany on June 6, 2020. Second, we scanned for reports covering the smaller, Berlin-based BLM demonstration on June 30. For both events, we selected all articles mentioning the respective protest events on the day before the event, the day of the event itself and the three following publication days.
- In Italy, we were particularly interested in the ways in which BLM acted as a discursive critical juncture in the mainstream and left-wing newspapers. Therefore, we selected *La Repubblica*, which is also the most frequently used newspaper in analyses of protest events and claims in media reports, and *Il Manifesto*, the only left-wing daily newspaper in Italy. We analyzed articles within the timeframe of June 2020, focusing on coverage of the anti-racist movement in Italy and the United States, and related protest events, as well as broader reflections on racism/anti-racism.
- In Denmark, we systematically analyzed 121 newspaper articles about Black Lives Matter mobilization and anti-racist debates in Denmark (removing articles that were not directly concerned with Denmark). We collected all articles published from May 26 to July 13, 2020 in order to capture the bulk of media coverage of the issue. We focused our search on two mainstream national newspapers: the liberal *Information* (50 articles), and the more conservative *Jyllands-Posten* (71 articles). To identify the relevant articles, we used the search phrase ((racisme* OR racist*) OR koloni* OR 'Black Lives Matter') AND (,danmark' OR dansk*) using the *Infomedia* database.
- In Poland, we focused on the online editions of the two leading daily newspapers: the left-liberal *Gazeta Wyborcza*, a newspaper with roots in the Solidarity movement and headed by the former dissident Adam Michnik, and *Rzeczpospolita*, a newspaper traditionally strongly tied to the state. The latter has a clearly conservative profile nowadays. Due to scarce coverage of the Polish BLM protests, we searched both newspapers for the term "Black Lives Matter" for the whole of 2020, and included the local sections of the newspapers.

3. Putting Black People and Anti-Black Racism Center Stage: BLM in Germany³

The global wave of Black Lives Matter protests in the aftermath of George Floyd's death resonated strongly within the German protest arena. In the time period of our analysis (May 26–July 30, 2020), we identified 83 protest events with explicit reference to Black Lives Matter, mobilizing a total of almost 200,000 protesters on the streets of many German cities. While the average protest event in Germany involved around 2,800 participants, the size of protests varied greatly, with the largest event assembling 25,000 in Munich, and the smallest 20 participants in Neubrandenburg. With protests taking place in all 16 Länder (states), the protest landscape was strongly decentralized. Large protests with 10,000 participants or more were organized in urban centers and university towns with a history of collective mobilization, including Berlin, Hamburg, Munich, Cologne, Leipzig, and Freiburg, but we also identified several protest events in smaller towns, such as Parchim in Mecklenburg-Vorpommern or Landau in Rhineland-Palatinate. The analysis documents a peak of protest activity in the week immediately following Floyd's death on May 25 – more than 75% of all demonstrations were recorded in this period – followed by a sharp decline thereafter. Most events identified in our protest-mapping were organized as street demonstrations,⁴ yet in line with many BLM protests in the U.S. and elsewhere, some were organized as 'silent demos.'⁵ All featured 8:46 minutes of complete silence as a way to commemorate and emphasize the scandal of the killing of George Floyd, who was held down for this period of time despite repeatedly stating "I can't breathe" (Hill et al. 2020). As in most other countries, the BLM demonstrations in Germany took place within the context of the COVID-19 pandemic. Thanks to decreasing incidence levels at this time of the year, however, the BLM demonstrations were not banned ex ante, becoming one of the first mass

protests in Germany after the lifting of some of the toughest COVID-19 restrictions in May.

The 2020 BLM protests created unprecedented visibility for Black activism and reconfigured the field of anti-racist activism in Germany. At the same time, the protests built upon previous Black and anti-racist mobilizations and unfolded in a discursive context in which racism had become increasingly salient. While anti-racist and Black activist groups had been indicating the reality of racism in Germany for decades (Ha, Al-Samarai & Mysorekar 2007), the issue had long remained on the margins of public debate and only occasionally become more central – usually in the aftermath of racist violence. One of these cases was the death of Sierra Leonean asylum-seeker Oury Jalloh, who, while in handcuffs, died in a fire in police custody in Dessau in 2005. Sustained efforts and collective mobilizations by the Initiative to Commemorate Oury Jalloh, against the odds, led to a repeated public debate (Vu 2018). In 2011, the uncovering of the so-called NSU (National Socialist Underground), an extreme right terrorist group responsible for racist murder and attempted murder in dozens of cases, was followed by sustained mobilizations of the relatives of victims and the broader anti-racist alliance NSU Komplex Auflösen (Dissolve NSU Complex). Following the 'long summer of migration' in 2015 and the growing electoral support for the radical right party Alternative für Deutschland (AfD), racism and anti-racism have gained further salience as topics in public debates. Since 2018, a series of mass demonstrations focused on migration, diversity and an open and inclusive society, have also explicitly addressed racism. The largest event, 'unteilbar,' in October 2018, mobilized almost a quarter of a million protesters alone (Stjepandić, Steinhilper & Zajak, forthcoming). The year 2018 was also the starting point of a number of

³ Authors: Folashade Ajayi, Moritz Sommer, Elias Steinhilper and Sabrina Zajak. The authors appreciate the excellent research assistance from Marina Seddig and Philipp Srama.

⁴ The protest mapping applied a rigid definition of protest, mainly limited to physical demonstrations in the streets. This excludes a number of online activities, panel discussions, or twitter campaigns (#Blacklivesmatter, #Blackouttuesday). From the beginning, these were an important dimension of the BLM protest in Germany and, as more and more COVID-19 related contact restrictions were introduced, these online activities became increasingly important.

⁵ Though constituting a novel form of action in the Germany context, this form of protest is common to the history of Black activism, particularly in the U.S. (Barron 2012).

racist threat letters and emails to politicians and other actors active in the field of anti-racism; connections to German police units are suspected. The letters, anonymously signed by NSU 2.0, continue until the present day (Erb et al. 2020). Finally, shortly before Floyd's death and the subsequent wave of BLM protests, two acts of racist terrorism further re-ignited public debate around racism in Germany: in October 2019, two people were shot in an attack against a synagogue and a kebab restaurant in Halle (New York Times 2019). In February 2020, a right-wing extremist shot ten people in a racist attack at two bars in the city of Hanau in Hesse (BBC News 2020). Both attacks fed the growing potential for anti-racist mobilization. BIPOC activists formed various 'Migrantifa' anti-racist groups; in some places, these were later involved in the June 2020 BLM protests. In June 2020, then, Floyd's murder set off an unprecedented wave of anti-racist protests in Germany.

Organizational Structure & Strategies

The BLM protests in Germany unfolded in a context in which the problematization of racism had slowly become more visible in public debates. In that sense, the protest built upon this increased awareness. What was new about this protest wave was that it mobilized new segments of society. The protests were predominantly spontaneously organized by young Black and/or Afrodiasporic – many of them women – with no previous experience in protest organization or strong ties to anti-racist organizations. This holds particularly true for several of the 'silent demos,' which were centrally initiated by two Black women, one of whom had never attended a protest before and who, prior to the BLM protest, did not see protest as a useful political tool:

"I remember how I cursed the Fridays for Future demos back then, because they always blocked everything and I never understood why they did that. In retrospect, however, having experienced it myself, I understand very well why people take to the streets and protest" (G 4).⁶

For the decentralized organization of protests, often in a very short period of time, social media

and messenger apps, particularly Instagram and Telegram, were key in the mobilization of both individual organizers and protesters. Pandemic-related contact restrictions made online tools even more important.

Despite the diversity of the Black and Afrodiasporic population(s) in Germany, the key organizers were young Black German citizens. Other groups, such as African migrants and migrant or refugee self-organizations, were less centrally involved. In some towns, the spontaneous organization of protests resulted in the revitalization of existing initiatives, e.g., the PoC Hochschulgruppe Leipzig. In others, by contrast, the central role of formerly unorganized individuals led to the creation of new local networks, e.g., Black Power Frankfurt, New Normal Saarbrücken, and Black Community Foundation, an emerging national network with representatives in more than twenty cities. Overall, the protests strengthened the decentralization of anti-racist activism by Black people and People of Color (PoC) outside of Berlin, where many established, vocal Black and PoC anti-racist initiatives and organizations have traditionally been based.

Time constraints in the planning of the demonstrations and, in some cases, the lack of knowledge about existing structures of Black and/or anti-racist activism among those without prior protest experience, often inhibited inter-organizational communication and collaboration. Debates on the relationship between anti-racism and identity politics among Black, PoC and white organizers further complicated organizational processes in some cases. At times, local groups supported Black individuals in taking up visible roles, and Black activists took on the role of spokespeople of the BLM demonstration, notably vis-à-vis white anti-racist activists. Other groups refused to include white activists as members of the organizational core at all.

Black activists also mentioned the lack of sensitivity concerning anti-racist debates and vocabulary (such as discussions about 'reverse racism' or whiteness)

⁶ Interviews in Germany, Italy and Poland were conducted in the respective national languages. This quote and the following ones are translations by the authors. Interviews in Denmark were conducted in English, and all quotes are from the original language.

among white (but also Black) activists as a source of conflict and as an emotional burden for the organizational work. The centering of Black actors and Black perspectives as part of Black anti-racist mobilizations in Germany created organizational challenges, but also initiated learning processes among groups and activists that had previously only sporadically interacted.

Beyond this embeddedness in the broader field of anti-racist activism in Germany, the BLM protests strongly affected relations in the heterogeneous field of Black activism in Germany. At times, the prominent role of ‘first-timers’ resulted in tensions between two different ‘generations’ of Black activists. The vigor of the newcomers was generally applauded and welcomed, although experienced activists also underlined a sense of frustration in the light of what was often conceived as naivety and a lack of awareness:

“[A]t times, this has been a frustrating experience, since we’ve been trying over and over again to point this out: Folks, Black activism in Germany doesn’t start in 2020, but has existed since... at least the late 80s” (G1).

Established Black organizations with experience in organizing often disagreed with newly emerging Black actors over forms of action, claims and framings. While many of these new actors favored explicitly non-contentious tactics and an affirmative signaling of peacefulness vis-à-vis the police and the wider public – e.g., by remaining silent and avoiding Black clothing that could potentially be seen as a symbol of the Black Bloc antifa – other groups opposed this approach. Some groups explicitly distanced themselves from the ‘silent demos,’ giving their demonstrations programmatic titles such as “break the silence” or “silence is not the answer.” There were also debates on the inclusiveness of the BLM protests, particularly on how centrally the intersections of anti-Black racism with other forms of oppression, such as (hetero-)sexism, anti-Muslim racism, or colorism, should be dealt with in the organizing process and addressed during the protest. In some cases, local coalitions were forged among different organizations and initiatives with different constituencies, but cross-movement coalitions

bridging other issues, including environmental activism, remained the exception.

Some of the established organizations, such as BLM Berlin, opted against organizing street protests altogether in times of pandemic. They stressed possible health hazards for the protesters and notably for Black protesters as a risk group at the intersection of racism and health. In this understanding, protecting Black lives meant refraining from protest and, consequently, BLM Berlin mainly focused on online activism. In addition to health risks, many organizers were worried about opposition by far-right actors and, indeed, some of the most visible activists were targeted by hate speech and online harassment. In at least three towns, far-right groups organized counter-protests to the BLM demonstrations, in Berlin under the slogan “White Lives Matter” (Süddeutsche Zeitung 2020).

Claims and Framing

Our analysis of the framing of BLM protests in Germany suggests that they were inspired by the racist murder of George Floyd and the subsequent mobilizations in the U.S., yet the protests were actively translated into the German context. The protests had very strong symbolic connections to the U.S., with frequent use of English slogans, the 8:46 minutes of silence referring to Floyd’s agony, and the widespread wearing of Black clothing to express grief. However, it is striking how few references to the U.S. context were made during the interviews. For one interviewee, it seemed that somehow “George Floyd [had] moved to the background,” whilst activists were attempting to ‘cut through’ the discursive tradition of denying the existence of racism in post-1945 Germany (G5). Relating anti-racist activism in Germany to racism in the U.S. was described as a double-edged sword. On the one hand, it opened a window of opportunity for advancing the anti-racist struggle, yet it also risked perpetuating a widespread narrative that racism and police violence were issues of importance predominantly *outside* of Germany.

The protest mapping documents a wide range of claims, which can broadly be differentiated as (1) institutional racism, (2) (post-)colonial legacies, and

(3) anti-Black racism as a specific form of racism. First, our findings suggest that, in the German context, the BLM protests mostly highlighted institutional forms of racism, and thereby countered the dominant individualistic narrative according to which racism is mostly perpetrated by extreme right-wing individuals on the fringes of society. Accordingly, organizers and protesters regularly referred to the sectors of education and health as settings in which racism takes places on a daily and *systemic* basis. Thus, their accounts of everyday racism – which were often distinguished from institutional racism – were tied to institutional settings. The protest explicitly addressed racist violence in Germany, including the recent attacks in Halle and Hanau, as rooted in structural forms of racism. In a similar vein, the death of George Floyd was translated into claims against (racist) police violence in Germany, including references to the previously cited case of Oury Jalloh. Claims also bridged Floyd’s death to practices of racial profiling in Germany and the scandalous connections between the police and far-right groups (NSU 2.0) – hinting at institutionalized routines as fertile grounds for racist violence.

Second, the protests were embedded in a critique of German colonial history and legacies. Interviewees pointed out the need to raise awareness of colonial atrocities committed in the former German colonies, including the genocide against the Nama and Herero in German South West Africa (now Namibia), and called for the renaming of public spaces that commemorate the colonial perpetrators.⁷

Third, the protest emphasized the situation of Black people and the reality of anti-Black racism as a specific form of racism in Germany. Overall, the protests had a clear focus on the voices, experiences and demands of Black individuals and groups in Germany. This resonates with the key role played by Black actors in organizing the protests and the self-empowerment by many young Black individuals. On the one hand, the struggle against anti-Black racism is located within broader anti-racist activism; on the other, some activists underline their conception of

anti-Black racism as different from other forms of racism, which should therefore be fought against with specific means:

“For me, BLM is exclusively for Black people. Generally, racism against Black people is something different and must be treated separately” (G5).

In this vein, some activists underlined that their protest was as much a message to a wider public as a protest “for us by us” – meaning an occasion for Black community building and empowerment. Various interviewees mentioned the extraordinary emotional intensity of the protests, noting that they

“had never seen so many people in tears,” or “we did not know each other, but we were crying together” (G2 and G6).

Aware of the emotional intensity and with the idea of creating safer spaces of empowerment during the protests, the first rows of the demonstration were reserved for Black protesters.

Given the strongly increased salience of migration-related issues in Germany since 2015, it is noteworthy that, when compared to other countries such as Denmark or Italy (see below), the interviewees only rarely explicitly bridged racism to migration policies and the situation of BIPOC migrants and asylum seekers. Exceptions were those cases in which local organizers involved individuals and groups who had been active during and since 2015.

Public Resonance

The broader impact of protest campaigns is directly connected to their resonance within the larger public sphere. In order to exert pressure, lodge their claims in the public agenda, and assert influence in one way or another, protests need to be visible to a wider audience. In the following, we assess several dimensions of the media coverage in three, entangled dimensions: the overall attention paid, the tone

⁷ In Berlin, a street and a metro station were renamed following the protests. Thus, local authorities eventually responded to Black organizations’ advocacy efforts over the course of several years.

or assessment of the protest, the media framing and the question of voice.⁸

Overall, and despite their divergent political orientations and differing affinity towards covering protests as a means of political articulation, the BLM protests on and around June 6 were broadly covered in the German newspapers we analyzed.⁹ This points to a comparatively strong resonance in the German public sphere at the height of the protest activity. In parallel with the declining protest activity in general, however, media attention soon diminished. The – though smaller and singular – demonstration in late June was covered only by the *taz*. The following comparison of newspaper coverage thus focuses on that of the first protest events in early June.

As expected, the left-leaning *taz*, with historical roots in and affinity towards progressive social movements, covered the protests most extensively with ten articles. But also the center-left *SZ* and the conservative *FAZ* each published three articles, and *Die Welt* published one longer article. Only in *BILD* was the coverage limited to one protest announcement with no further retrospective reports.

Overall, all newspapers, with the exception of *BILD*, engaged with the protesters' claims and with the main topic of racism; none of the reports was openly dismissive. And yet, when it came to the main focus of the reporting, to the framing of the protest, and to the overall assessment of the protest and the protesters, we found significant differences among the newspapers.

Again, the left-leaning *taz* marked one pole, with an unequivocally positive assessment of the protest, giving a strong voice to BIPOC protest organizers, with long direct quotes in the protest reporting. Furthermore, the articles engaged in detail with the claims articulated by the movement pointing at “all variants” (Guyton, Zaheer & Lehmann 2020) of racism in Germany, including police violence, microaggressions, and institutional racism. The coverage explicitly stressed that the protest erupted

in reaction to the death of George Floyd in the U.S., yet it underlined that they were primarily motivated by grievances rooted in domestic practices and structures of racism. The protests were described with positive attributes as “impressive,” “unique,” and “peaceful” (Guyton, Zaheer & Lehmann 2020; Peter 2020) – one article even suggested that “the protests must continue until racism ends” (Peter 2020). The *taz* also highlighted the innovative character of the ‘silent demo’ as a powerful symbol to protest against racism.

The coverage in *SZ* was characterized by an overall positive tone, supporting the cause in standing up to racism in general and racism in Germany in particular. Similar to *taz*, *SZ* gave extensive voice to protest organizers and Black German celebrities, including footballer Jerome Boateng. *SZ* also highlighted the ambivalence of protesting in the time of a pandemic and discussed the individual and societal risks of infection.

FAZ, which mainly concentrated on the protests in Frankfurt, instead placed the anti-COVID-19 restrictions center stage. The assessment of the protesters was again quite positive, but the basis for this judgement differed in comparison to *taz* and *SZ*. In line with the focus on the pandemic, the journalists underlined how responsibly the protesters wore masks and complied with physical distancing rules (FAZ 2020). While the *FAZ* coverage was furthermore characterized by a more descriptive tone and fewer direct quotes from demonstrators, the articles still gave space to the claims of the protesters, reporting slogans and topics raised during speeches.

In contrast to this relatively strong and positive resonance in three leading German national newspapers, the two print outlets of the traditionally conservative *Springer* publishing house markedly differ. While *Die Welt* generally acknowledges that the BLM protests address a legitimate cause, the coverage maintains a dominant critical position. Rather than engaging with the claims articulated

⁸ For more details on the methodology applied, see the text box on pp. 5–6.

⁹ For a more detailed assessment of the media coverage on protests in Germany, see Teune & Sommer 2017.

during the protests and the social problem of racism in Germany, the reporting focuses on the risks to public health emanating from the demonstrations, and the potential violence of “radical left activists” (Leubecher 2020). In contrast to the considerable space attributed to direct quotes by demonstrators in *taz* and *SZ*, the article mainly quotes police officials and politicians speaking about the protests. *BILD* ignored the protests altogether, limiting the reporting to very general protest announcements and highlighting the challenges the demonstrations might cause for public authorities and commuters.

Despite the differences mentioned above, which – as expected – reflect the general political leaning of the newspapers in our sample, the analysis shows that at least the protest in early June had considerable resonance in the German public sphere, with an overall positive reception. The predominantly sympathetic reporting by *FAZ*, in particular, documents that the protests succeeded in reaching from a niche in society to the center of society with their focus on non-disruptive forms of action (the ‘silent demos’) and their efforts to display support of the regulations to reduce infections. The majority of the reporting goes beyond mere description, and *taz* and *SZ* in particular give a voice to the protesters to articulate their demands in their own words. For many articles, the murder of George Floyd, which was intensively covered in the German media, serves as the starting hook, but several articles engage

more deeply with the protesters’ claims. The protests are framed as both a commemoration of a victim of racist violence in the U.S. and as mobilizations against a relevant problem in Germany. At the height of the protest activity, the BLM protest succeeded in situating the debate about racism within the German context.

Conclusion

In Germany, the wave of BLM protests marked a turning point for anti-racist mobilizations and for the debate about racism in Germany for several reasons: First, the protests brought an unprecedented visibility to the issue of racism in Germany, mirrored in the broad and predominantly sympathetic media coverage; racism, and in particular anti-Black racism, was finally placed center stage, no longer remaining on the margins of public debate. Second, the mobilizations and their focus on anti-Black racism drew public attention to Black Germans as an “invisible visible minority” (ENAR 2014). Third, the protests strengthened the role of Black activists within the heterogeneous anti-racist movement scene in Germany. Fourth, new actors entered the scene and we witnessed a strong self-empowerment of formerly non-active individuals who will potentially reconfigure the future field of Black activism in Germany. Finally, the protests highlighted the institutional nature of racism, which reaches far beyond individual attacks committed by far-right actors.

4. A Critical Juncture for Anti-Racism: BLM in Italy¹⁰

In Italy, as in other countries, the BLM protest wave in the summer of 2020 constituted a critical juncture. It generated an abrupt transformation in the field of anti-racist protests, both through the convergence of groups active in different movement areas and on different issues and claims, and through the emergence of new social movement organizations. In terms of forms of action, not only have the pandemic times, with their related anti-contagion measures, created the need for adaptation, but collective performances have also spread cross-nationally, blending with those that already exist. Finally, in terms of framing, the coalitions built in action brought about a new sensitivity to racialization, as well as the bridging of it with different forms of discrimination and repression.

While a momentous and innovative campaign, the BLM events in the summer of 2020 have to be seen as well as embedded in the legacies of a development of the family of progressive social movements. Focusing attention on the last two decades, Italy was in fact characterized by specific political transformations that affected social movements in different forms. After having played a leading role in the Global Justice Movement, as seen in holding the first European Social Forum in Florence, the progressive social movements in Italy remained very active, especially on social issues such as the commodification of higher education and the privatization of water supply, but also fragmented. Unlike in other major Southern European countries, no party alternative emerged on the Left, while the dissatisfaction with the center-right and, subsequently, the ‘grand coalition’ governments during the financial crisis was instead channeled by the Five Star Movement (5SM), initially focused on environmental issues, then more and more ambivalently on the claims of progressive movements (Mosca 2019).

For the background of the Black Lives Matter protests in Italy, the experience of the government formed by the Five Star Movement and the Lega

(in power from June 2018 to August 2019) seems of considerable importance. However, the backlash against social justice and equality rights did not come directly from the ‘populism’ of the 5SM, but rather from a sharp shift in the right-wing spectrum, under the leadership of the Lega’s Secretary General Matteo Salvini (Stille 2018). The controversial policies of Lega chief Matteo Salvini as interior minister – in particular against immigration, against pro-refugee organizations conducting rescue operations in the Mediterranean, but also in his alleged defense of the ‘traditional family’ – triggered important protest mobilizations on anti-racist, anti-fascist and anti-discrimination platforms (Padovani 2018). It was in fact against the growing racism and reactionary policies of the Lega that social movements started to organize and resist. Not by chance, the stronger mobilization came on issues of gender equality rights and migrant rights. In this context, BLM built upon the anti-Lega coalition that, together with the protests against climate change by Fridays for Future activists, brought an increasing number of citizens onto the streets.

The Protest Wave

For Italy, the protest mapping for Black Lives Matter protests yielded a surprisingly high number of cases, considerably more than those covered by the main national newspapers. In addition, the cases discovered were distributed over time and space, whereas those covered by the national press were predominantly events that took place on June 6, 2020 in Italy’s largest cities. Moreover, the press paid particular attention to the gestures of athletes – e.g., soccer players kneeling on the field with a fist raised – that for the coding of the Italian cases were mostly disregarded. The web search also brought out more detailed information on the form of events, the composite nature of the organizations involved, and the variegated claims put forward at the events.

In these mobilizations, organizations of various backgrounds – old left, new left, human rights, ecology, LGBTIQ+ – cooperated. This cooperation

¹⁰ Authors: Donatella della Porta, Anna Lavizzari and Herbert Reiter.

(and the mobilizations) already existed, albeit to a minor degree and at a lesser level, also when, in September 2019, a new government formed by the Five Star Movement, the center-left Democratic Party and the left *Liberi e Uguali* came into power. The new government was, in fact, slow to implement new interior and immigration policies, e.g., by abrogating Salvini's 'security decrees.' In connection with the regional election campaigns, starting in autumn 2019, even a new movement, the *Sardine*, emerged, mobilizing against Salvini and the *Lega*. Protests on this and other issues also went on during the pandemic.

From the geographical point of view, notwithstanding some differences, a fairly even distribution of Black Lives Matter protests throughout the country can be observed. If the regions are grouped geographically, the North has 54.3% of the cases and 46.0% of the population, the Center 17.9% of the cases and 19.9% of the population, the South 27.8% of the cases and 34.1% of the population. Long-standing political cleavages continued, however, to exert an influence. The geographical North, in fact, includes one of the four traditionally 'red' regions of Italy, namely Emilia-Romagna. Two of the traditionally 'red'/communist regions, Emilia-Romagna and Tuscany, alone account for 23.2% of the cases (with just 13.6% of the population). Among the cities where events were held, medium-sized ones are strongly represented: 59 with fewer than 100,000 inhabitants, of which 29 have less than 50,000.

The form of events in Italy was determined by the COVID-19 restrictions in force: starting on June 3, travel restrictions within Italy were lifted, but the ban on gatherings and assemblies and the rules on social distancing remained. On that basis, street demonstrations were for the most part prohibited, and effectively were extremely rare. When they occurred, they were mostly organized by groups that are defined as part of the "antagonist left" in the Italian mainstream press, who for instance occupied social centers, or held, according to the organizers, not street demonstrations but 'walks.'

The dominant event form in Italy was variously defined by the organizers as a 'presidio,' flash-mob or sit-in. It consisted of meeting in a public

square, usually a central one in front of the town hall, the building of the *Prefettura* or, where they existed, American consulates or embassies. The organizers took care to comply with COVID-19 restrictions, insisting on the wearing of masks and on social distancing. In order to ensure the latter, in many cases organizers marked the space for each demonstrator with an "X" on the pavement. Notwithstanding these precautions, the press reported on attempts by the police to identify and fine participants for allegedly not complying with COVID-19 restrictions.

Usually, the event included 8:46 minutes of silence, the time span of George Floyd's agony. Another feature, seen in retrospect by many organizers as the most important, consisted of an open microphone, giving voice to those who are not usually heard. The open microphone was often used by migrants and/or second-generation immigrants and Black Italians to denounce their own experiences of racist attitudes in Italy, the impact of Italian laws institutionalizing racism, and in particular the recent 'security decrees' of Matteo Salvini and the laws on citizenship (in Italy following the *ius sanguinis*, not *ius culturae* or *ius soli*).

Other actions included painting a multi-colored giant mural (up to 100 meters long) – not of "Black Lives Matter" but "Black Human Migrant Lives Matter" – on the surface of streets or squares. Actions in the U.S. and Great Britain against statues of historical figures labelled as racist had a significant reverberation in Italy. Among other things, some of these similar actions targeted Columbus, as well as the statue of Indro Montanelli in a Milan park, and other symbols of Italian colonialism, together with campaigns to rename metro stations and streets.

As for the organizers, reports particularly stress the presence of many young people at the events. In fact, organizations of high school and university students were prominently represented among the organizers. From the very beginning, some of these groups followed a national strategy: *Link* – *Coordinamento Universitario*, *Rete della Conoscenza* and *Unione degli Studenti* called for the organization of flash mobs in front of embassies, consulates and town halls for June 6; other events were organized

locally and from below, and the sources give the names of individuals as organizers; in some cases, these individuals also formed a Black Lives Matter group or collective. Migrants, second-generation immigrants, and Black Italians were very much present as participants – in particular making use of the opportunity of the open microphone – but also as organizers of events (as individuals or as organizations) or as adherents (as organizations). We find both organizations of migrants (often organized on the basis of origin, i.e., Senegalese, Moroccan, etc.) and of second-generation immigrants (like NIBI: Neri Italiani – Black Italians). In a conspicuous number of cases, we found organizations connected with the refugee crisis and with rescue operations in the Mediterranean as organizers and/or participants in events. Moreover, LGBTIQ+ organizations (Arcigay, various Pride committees, etc.) took part in numerous events, on one occasion (Oristano) being the only organizer. If we look at the left-wing political spectrum, the old left is certainly visible, but predominantly with former collateral organizations of the Italian Communist Party (PCI), in particular ARCI (Associazione ricreativa e culturale Italiana), which already played an important role in the global justice movement. Also, ANPI, the national association of partisans, was present as a participant organization and in some cases as an organizer. In addition, of the established trade unions, the participation of the old left CGIL was particularly visible. The new left was present particularly with grassroots trade unions and in occupied social centers. Parties of the left were present as supporters, though not as organizers of events.

Considering the various backgrounds of the organizations involved, it is not surprising that we also find a considerable variety of claims. Needless to say, most, if not all, events included the core claims of Black Lives Matter protests, i.e., anti-racism, anti-police brutality and justice for the victims. At numerous events, these claims were connected with the situation in Italy in various ways. The demand “Say their names” was translated into hand-painted placards with this slogan (in English) followed by the names of Black people killed in Italy. Concerning police brutality, alongside relatives of Black victims, relatives of white Italian victims appeared as speakers at BLM rallies, as in Florence. Very much

present in various events was the case of Stefano Cucchi, who died in police custody in 2009. Because of the activism of his sister Ilaria, who appeared at several BLM events, this case had a considerable impact on Italian public opinion. The drowning of refugees in the Mediterranean and the conditions of migrant workers, in particular in Italian agriculture, were also recurring themes.

In quite a large number of cases, groups on the (extreme) right attacked Black Lives Matter protests and actions: counter-demonstrations were conducted (e.g., in Lucca); members of local city councils protested against the permission given to the Sardinians to create their giant “Human Black Migrant Lives Matter” street mural; Black Lives Matter murals were covered with counter-inscriptions; right-wing graffiti condemned BLM protests, and in some cases denigrated George Floyd; members of right-wing groups stood guard at nationalist monuments in order to protect them. A common and recurring slogan was “white lives matter,” accusing BLM protesters of being disinterested in the condition of (white) Italians (often with reference to the consequences of COVID-19 restrictions) and of betraying and undermining the cultural foundations of the nation.

Organizational Structure & Strategies

Most of the protests were carried out at the local level, in a horizontal and rather diffused, spontaneous way. We can observe three main organizational formats: in some cases, they were initiated by individuals previously active in existing groups (already part of either the broader anti-racism/migrant justice movement or leftist collectives), who nevertheless decided to call the protest as individuals rather than on behalf of the group. In other cases, the protest emerged through spontaneous actions of single or small groups of individuals with no history of political engagement, supported (logistically, materially, with the permit to protest) by active groups in the local area. It has to be noted that the timing of the protests and the creation of a respective local BLM group is not linear. Only in a few cases did centralized coordinated attempts to spread or diffuse protests to other cities by the national BLM organization lead to the creation

of a local group. In most cases, the emergence of a local group happened in the wake of the protest.

In terms of form and practices, most of the protests were described as peaceful, with no interference from the police unless to enforce the time limit for the protest. Protests occurred as sit-ins, followed or preceded by silent marches, public speeches and open microphone. The crowds were described as mixed in terms of participation of racialized/non-racialized people and migrants, of different age, gender and professional background (university professors were often mentioned and, in some cases, politicians were among the participants). All interviewees stressed, however, the massive presence of young people. Social media played a major role in the extremely rapid organization of the events (Whatsapp, Telegram), and their diffusion (Facebook, Instagram), which brought previously unengaged individuals together with local activists and spread the events across the population.

After the protests of June 2020, some groups claimed to organize protests in solidarity with BLM (U.S.) in their city, but maintained an identity detached from the label of the movement itself. Others adopted the BLM cause in full (name, symbols, etc.) during the protest, and decided only at a later stage to adapt it to the Italian national and local context:

“It is a fact that BLM in the U.S. has created this momentum, the resonance of it, the scope, at the global level, in terms of attention and numbers. But this fact also led people to ask themselves questions about their own country, their own city. We need BLM to say out loud that the problem exists also here, even if contextualized to Italy” (13).

Externally, temporary coalitions were initially built with existing local activist networks, mostly for logistical reasons (leftist, student, feminist groups, social centers). Many of the groups found major allies in local groups with a strong youth component – right now in Italy mostly feminist groups and Fridays for Future. The practice of intersectionality

emerges forcefully as the rationale of these coalitions, with the organization of joint events:

“An intersectional approach is emerging in which the Black issue is highly focused on the aspect of migration, but not only. It is aware of the other discriminations, it talks about institutional racism, environmental racism, the one linked to the phase of feminism and the LGBTQ+ community” (15).

BLM is also closer to other movements that have mobilized on issues of the Afro-Italianità, on *ius soli* struggles, issues of citizenship, particularly from the strong and established second-generation migrant movement in Italy. Their idea of political identity is based on the recognition of “not white but Italian.” Only a few organizations (BLM Rome in particular) have also built contact outside Italy and directly with BLM in the U.S. or other U.S.-based movements (Women’s March, The World is Watching).

In terms of framing, BLM is perceived as an opportunity not only to address systemic racism of different forms (not only anti-Black), but mostly to give voice to Black people, their narratives, their positions, and representation. police violence is linked more broadly to structural/institutional violence, mentioning similar episodes of violence in Italy, such as the cases of Willy Monteiro and Idy Diene.¹¹ The nation’s colonial past but also local colonialism (Sardinia, South Tyrol) is also often called into question by activists on issues of resignification of Italian history, particularly its representation through symbols (statues, monuments, etc.), but also at the cultural level, through music, writing and more broadly through political narratives.

In general, the localization of issues by activists and organizations has worked very well in Italy. From the start, people came to speak up in all of the protests about their experience as Black people in Italy, as migrants in Italy, as victims of racism in Italy. The organizations emphatically pointed out the differences between the situation in Italy and the U.S., stressing the specificities and severity of

¹¹ Willy Monteiro and Idy Diene are two recent victims of racist violence, killed in September 2020 and March 2018, respectively.

the daily experiences of Black and racialized people in Italy. In this sense, the diverse frames with cultural resonance in the national context, rooted in Italian history and experience, represent a major framing strategy. Moreover, of key significance in this process was the double move of distancing the protests from BLM in the U.S. and localizing frames in the national context by naming and exposing (or shaming) Italy's and Italian experiences and episodes of racism.

The greatest long-term impact, as acknowledged by activists, is the inclusion and representation of Black people in the organizing structures of previously existing groups, and the emergence of new ones focused on creating new spaces for Black people to speak, act and narrate. The vast majority of these are racialized youth, students, the unrepresented, those who 'feel voiceless,' who mobilized for the first time in the wake of the diffusion of BLM in Italy. Some groups have grown rapidly since the protests and, despite the pandemic, have already established strong networks at the local level, started many initiatives and activities especially at the cultural level, and plan next to move on to the institutional level – particularly in the school and education system.

The idea of creating a 'national network' is present in the narratives of all groups. In general, there is appreciation for having received unprecedented attention (in terms of participation in other events, initiatives, interviews, talks, services, etc.) by other groups and movements (but also the media, institutions and researchers), which clearly created great enthusiasm and opportunities to expand and gain visibility, an audience ('followers'), and political weight.

The impact of the pandemic emerges around three aspects: 1) the organization of the protests, which happened virtually and had restrictions imposed on the day of the June protests; some activists consider that the situation caused a potential downturn in the numbers of participants; others acknowledge that the particularly strong mobilization of young people may have been facilitated by the context of 'stay at home' measures; 2) the creation of a moment to release anger, frustration, anxiety (safety valve)

in a context where 'all that is rotten has come out' through different crises, not only the pandemic; 3) the limitation imposed on current and future activities of the groups (which might have "killed" the energies and momentum for some of them), due to the continuing restrictions on mobility and physical – particularly group – activities.

Public Resonance

From the outset of the Black Lives Matter protests, *La Repubblica* covered the evolution of events in the U.S. with a variety of articles. Overall, in fact, in May–June 2020 the paper dedicated more attention to the mobilizations in the U.S. than to those in Europe and Italy. Surprisingly, this seems to hold true for *Il Manifesto* as well, which (even more surprisingly) did not publish any article specifically covering a single Italian protest event, but only a series of photographs of the events in Bologna and Turin (June 6, 2020). *La Repubblica* (June 7, 2020; June 8, 2020) reported on the protest events in the main Italian cities (e.g., Rome, Milan, Turin), with more events covered in the various local/regional editions of the paper.

The pandemic as a background is present in many reports on BLM protests in Italy, where COVID-19 restrictions defined the form and size of protest events. The reports in *La Repubblica* on BLM protests in Italy in general emphasize the efforts of organizers and participants to respect the COVID-19 restrictions. In the connection made between BLM protests and the pandemic, the latter often appears less as a constituent element and more as a catalyst enabling a more forceful emphasis on the arguments already well-rehearsed in public debate and/or an emphasis in a new way. This also seems to be the case for the connection between the economic crisis caused by the pandemic and the BLM protests drawn by *Il Manifesto*, e.g., in an article published under the title "To breathe together, to breathe freely – in the world to be" (June 15, 2020, translated by the authors). For the left-wing daily, there were many causes that impeded people's breathing: the pandemic, climate change, the most catastrophic economic crisis of the last century. Stressing intersectionality (and anti-capitalism), *Il Manifesto* called for connecting the various mobilizations of recent times in a fight for a world to be and presented a program ("without

a fight, and organization of the fight, no program”) that had emerged in a series of online debates.

Particularly in the first phase, one part of the coverage of BLM protests by *La Repubblica* seems to argue that the situation in Italy is different from that in the United States, by stressing above all compassion for the victim, George Floyd, and solidarity with the protesters in the U.S. An explicit discussion of the discrepancy between declarations of solidarity with the movement in the U.S. and a reluctance to face the implications of racism in Italy is largely absent in the coverage of BLM protests by *La Repubblica*.

The interpretation that BLM protests indicate that racism as a problem also exists in Italy is, however, not entirely absent from *La Repubblica*’s reporting, and seems to dominate the pages of *Il Manifesto*. In particular, in its articles on specific BLM protest events in Italy, *La Repubblica* reports on participants denouncing racism as a problem in the country, as in the case of Turin and other cities in the province. In most cases, however, references to racism as a problem in Italy are combined with explicit or implicit affirmations that this problem is different, takes less pronounced forms, and is easier to solve.

Significantly, what was at stake for *Il Manifesto* daily was the self-representation of Italian society, the affirmation once and for all of its heterogeneous and ‘happily mixed character,’ irreducible to any nationalist narrative. Broadening the issue, an editorial in the pages of *Il Manifesto* specifically discussed the question of the lives for which nobody took a knee (June 13, 2020). As general cases, it cites migrants drowning in the Mediterranean, Palestinians killed by Israel, and Kurds massacred by Erdoğan; as individual cases, Giulio Regeni, the Italian university researcher tortured and killed in Egypt, and Iyad Hallaq, the autistic Palestinian boy killed by Israeli security forces in Jerusalem a week before.

In comparison with a generally humanitarian, anti-discrimination or anti-racist discourse, the criticism of police brutality, in particular in Italy, is considerably less present in the newspapers covered and, in particular as far as *La Repubblica* is

concerned, to a large extent restricted to reporting slogans used at protest events and quoting remarks made by participants. *Il Manifesto*, in contrast, dedicated an editorial to the problem of police violence under the title “The protests lifted the veil on the repression of the police” (June 15, 2020). Stating that, with occasional exceptions, the motto of almost all state sovereignties had always been “the police are always right,” the article diagnoses for recent times a growing range of discretionary actions, arbitrariness and impunity of police forces. The program that *Il Manifesto* presented (June 15, 2020) speaks only in passing of the “profound structural injustice that pervades the police and the judiciary.”

The various positions of the newspapers covered emerge most clearly in the reports and editorials on the more radical forms of action connected with BLM protests in Italy, in particular on actions targeting certain monuments and place names connected with Italy’s colonial and fascist past. The action that provoked the most controversial debate connected with BLM protests in Italy was conducted by a group of university students in Milan. They sprayed (non-indelible) red paint on the statue of Indro Montanelli, situated in a Milan park carrying his name, and added the words “racist, rapist” (*La Repubblica*, June 14, 2020). Whereas *La Repubblica*, which had lauded the peaceful character of the presidi and sit-ins organized in the first week of June, criticized the presumed violence of these actions and charged that their aims were similar to censorship, *Il Manifesto* defended the legitimacy of such actions, interpreting them as symbolic politics, and saw radical actions as necessary in the current anti-racist struggle. An article in *Il Manifesto* discussing in general the “statues of shame” asserted that memory was not simply a depository of times past, of a closed era, but an active force in the present. It specifically highlighted reminders of fascism, like the inscription “Mussolini Dux” on an obelisk at the Olympic stadium in Rome, because it not only celebrated the past but legitimated fascists today. The author declared his satisfaction that BLM induced people to remember what was written on that obelisk, but confessed having difficulties with statues of Columbus. This was not some kind of “other” for him, because the “glorious story of Columbus” had been instilled in him since he was a child, as a part

of Italian national identity. For native Americans it meant instead a violence that continues until the present day and ongoing discrimination. To look at a statue of Columbus with their eyes was more difficult for an Italian because it imposes recognition “that we are not as we have been told.” Campaigns targeting street and place names connected with the colonial and fascist past of Italy did not receive a lot of coverage. Specifically, on the pages of *La Repubblica*, the problem of white privilege and supremacy is rarely discussed.

Conclusion

In Italy, the BLM campaign of June 2020 has strengthened the anti-racist movement, with the inclusion of new members, particularly young second-generation migrants and young Black Italians. The political protagonism and visibility of Black and

racialized subjectivities is unprecedented in scale and scope, and establishes a clear difference from the past history of the movement in the country. Moreover, the campaign has seen a growing diffusion of anti-racist claims, not only in society at large, but importantly across multiple movements, with the establishment of new intersectional alliances. Certainly, the momentum has provided greater visibility and raised awareness across different sectors of the society. Yet at the political and institutional level, we still witness little if no impact, as no progress has been made in terms of citizenship law reform, and although the “new” security decree approved on October 2020 (formally replacing Salvini’s two former security decrees) introduced a few changes in terms of the reception and humanitarian protection for migrants, it does not affect the law on citizenship.

5. “We Saw the Chance to Build This Movement”: BLM in Denmark¹²

The Danish anti-racist movement – and Black Lives Matter mobilization in particular – is a novel, emerging movement that has been growing consistently over the past five years. The majority of organizers were active previously in the anti-racist movement, and particularly in the pro-refugee movement. Yet many of the participants and even some organizers of the BLM protests were first-time activists in their twenties and thirties, alongside older and more experienced activists.

The historic rise of far-right political parties in Denmark in the past decade is important in understanding the organizational history of BLM in Denmark. Its roots are in anti-racist organizing and refugee solidarity organizations. The founders of Black Lives Matter Denmark (BLM DK) are Danish citizens of color, African migrants, and Western migrants, many of them students. Many BLM protest organizers have previously been engaged in grassroots, local solidarity organizing with incarcerated migrants and rejected asylum seekers who are held in Denmark’s notorious prison camps for rejected asylum seekers (see, e.g., Doerr 2019). BLM organizers related that they established their networks and received their “training” in protest tactics and strategy in the context of the anti-racist refugee solidarity movement, established a decade ago by white Danish activists (Interviews D2 and D6). Other BLM organizers have a background in organizations led by People of Color focusing on solidarity with the Global South. The younger generation of BLM organizers has become politicized through their everyday experiences of racism and its denial in mainstream society, which insists on norms of ‘color-blindness’. Activists critically framed this denial as ‘hygge racism’ (using the famous Danish sense of coziness – hygge – to designate pervasive yet silenced forms of racism in everyday life) and tied it to their experiences of structural racism in Denmark. In the most recent wave of protests, following the killing of George Floyd, BLM in Denmark experienced unprecedented media visibility, supporting pre-existing mobilization to

stimulate greater collective awareness and public debate about racism against minorities and the legacy of colonialism and slave trade.

In the two months following the killing of George Floyd in the U.S., the Danish anti-racist movement organized 29 events in total. Most protest events drew between a few dozen and a few hundred participants. The largest protest event took place in Copenhagen on June 7, 2020, and was organized by BLM DK. The protest started in front of the American Embassy in Østerbro, and included a march and an assembly with speeches at the endpoint of the march in front of the Danish parliament. The demonstration drew a crowd of approximately 20,000 participants, a remarkably large turnout in the Danish context. The largest group of participants were young and majority-ethnic Danes. This major protest event was preceded by seven demonstrations across the country that served as the build-up to the June 7 mass protest.

Events were organized in Copenhagen (12 of them) and across the country, in both large and small cities. Since the restrictions due to COVID-19 were at that point not as strict in Denmark as in some other countries, most of the events were marches and demonstrations. In addition, there were six cases of direct action at historic monuments that commemorate figures from Denmark’s colonialist past, five in Denmark and one in Greenland, an autonomous territory under Danish rule. All but five of the protests were held in June.

Organizational Structure & Strategies

While BLM DK and allies organized the majority of protests in Copenhagen, events were also organized by independent cultural institutions, and Muslim-rights organizations. Outside of Copenhagen, the make-up of the organizers was more diverse: in addition to BLM DK, local anti-racist groups organized demonstrations in Odense, Aarhus, Aalborg, and other large and small cities. Some of the organizations were ad-hoc mobilizations of individual

¹² Authors: Noa Milman and Nicole Doerr. The authors wish to thank Josefine Dahl Hansen, Frederikke Møller Helvad and Stella Kristine Faal for their excellent research support.

citizens without organizational background, who were moved by the killing of George Floyd and inspired by the massive international mobilization. Some of the newly organized groups did not maintain a structured organization, but at least one group, the Afro-Danish Collective, was able to institutionalize and remain an active organization within the larger anti-racist movement.

This wave of mobilization has reduced tensions among anti-racist movement groups in Denmark. Historically, there were tensions between African-Danish activists and Middle Eastern Muslim activists in Denmark, with African-Danish activists often feeling that their cause was excluded from the mobilization of Middle Eastern Muslim activists in Denmark. They also felt that the unique challenges of the Somali community (African and Muslim) had not been adequately addressed in Muslim organizations' work in Denmark. The vast mobilization of the summer of 2020 led to improved dialogue between the different organizations representing various minority groups in Denmark and in Greenland. The activists reported improved communication channels, a greater understanding of the other groups' needs, and a major joint effort that is shared by a large coalition of organizations, which together pushed to pass an anti-discrimination plan in the 2021 budget. In the words of one activist:

"[The budget plan action is] a very strong example of merging what politically needs to be done with how important it is that these different organizing bodies actually do collaborate." This work, our interviewee concluded, effectively "build[s] up an ecosystem" (D3).

All of the activists we interviewed agreed that the BLM campaign in the summer of 2020 had a tremendous impact on the anti-racist movement in Denmark. For one, a new organization, the Afro-Danish Collective, was created as a direct result of the mobilization. As one activist put it:

"It was because of that momentum we experienced, with the protest, but also the talk online and in the Danish news, and [we ...] saw [the] chance to start this movement" (D1).

Another activist assessed the impact of the BLM campaign on the movement more broadly:

"When, all of a sudden, the killing of George Floyd and Breonna Taylor... When that ignites a movement and a public discourse so strong as we saw this year, you can only lose if you don't back it up. [...] I think the pressure of the Black Lives Matter movement and the focus this time around has proved the catalyst for people working together in much more direct ways, and leaving aside personal difference. They could see that this was the momentum that they needed to build on if we really were to create future change and lasting change" (D3).

Our interviews confirm the perceived importance of the BLM protest wave in advancing and stimulating movement growth and synergy across groups.

Claims and Framing

Mobilizations following the killing of George Floyd drew heavily on the American case. We can see this in the movement's communication materials and calls for action. The names of George Floyd, Breonna Taylor and other references to victims of police brutality in the U.S. predominated in posters, Facebook invitations, and slogans chanted in protests. Similarly, the movement emphasized the structural nature of racism in the U.S., and its long history since enslavement. It is also interesting to note that the majority of posters in most protests were written in English rather than Danish. This can be attributed to the English-centered youth culture in Denmark and activists' sense of belonging to a larger international movement. However, from a critical intersectional perspective on framing, the use of English simultaneously has the effect of distancing activists' protests from local problems of racism in Denmark (particularly on the part of white and newly engaged participants).

One strategy of frame bridging that helps the movement connect to the U.S. and at the same time create public attention for a moral need to address latent racism in Denmark was activists' calls for the Danish government to take a stand against police brutality and racism in the U.S. ("Denmark's silence is deafening"). A typical call for action read:

“We demand that the Danish government speak up against the brutality and murders by their close ally and take measures to root out systemic racism in Denmark and the U.S.” (multiple Facebook event descriptions).

Other frames focused more directly on racism in Denmark, calling for an end to what the media called ‘hygge racism’ and drawing attention to instances of micro-aggressions and structural racism. Speakers in protests and in the media were primarily bridging and connecting the U.S. framing of racism to the Danish context by sharing their experiences with racism in daily life –physical assaults, insults, denial of their belonging, discrimination, and over-policing. Thus, they translated the universal messages against racism to a Danish-specific context.

One case that created moral outrage and galvanized the movement was the recent murder of Phillip Mbuji Johansen, an African-Danish man, on the idyllic island of Bornholm. Johansen was tortured to death by two brothers, one with a known affiliation with the far right and tattoos of swastikas and ‘white power’ on his leg. Beyond the cruelty of the murder, the case stirred outrage among activists due to the police refusal to categorize it as hate crime, and due to the media’s initial scarce coverage of the case. Given that the murder took place on June 23, 2020, the movement was able to employ it as a potent illustration of structural racism in Denmark. Another related topic, which became the focus of one protest in July 2020, was Danish media’s lack of diversity and failure to acknowledge and address racism in Denmark.

The performative aspects of the protests included kneeling in silence for the duration of the time of Floyd’s killing; chanting “I can’t breathe”; and painting over statues that immortalize historic persons and symbols connected with Denmark’s history of colonialism in Greenland. While the first two gestures were directly linked to the U.S. context, the latter addressed the Danish context of colonialization and discrimination against Inuit people in Greenland.

The BLM DK organization has historically been an active and visible force in protests for asylum seekers

and the demand to shut down refugee camps in Denmark. This created a fruitful exchange in which BLM signs became a part of the protest for asylum seekers’ rights, and BLM protests included calls to shut down refugee camps and prisons in Denmark in chants and written materials of the movement (“Ellebæk Prison, shut it down” and “Kærshovedgård, shut it down”).

Last but not least, among all groups, it was Greenlandic activists who on social media and in interaction with journalists took a major role in frame bridging and translating the international discussion on public monuments that uphold and exalt colonialist presence and values to the Danish context. The two most prominent actions in that context involved the statue of Hans Egede, a Danish-Norwegian missionary, who played a central role in the colonization of Greenland. The first action was in the capital of Greenland, Nuuk, where anonymous activists painted Egede’s towering sculpture red. On the plinth of the sculpture, activists wrote ‘DECOLONIZE’ in red letters. The anonymous activists issued a statement in English that read: “It’s about time that we stop celebrating colonizers and that we start taking back what is rightfully ours. It’s time to decolonize our minds and our country. No colonizer deserves to be on top of a mountain like that. We need to learn the truth of our history” (Hansen 2020). Days later, another sculpture of Egede, this one in Copenhagen, was painted red. The direct actions at Egede’s sculptures led to a debate on Denmark’s role in colonialism and the slave trade. Notwithstanding activists’ efforts, a subsequent popular vote in Greenland determined that the statue should remain in its current location in the capital Nuuk. While the activists were very successful in raising awareness of Danish colonization in Greenland, it is important to note that despite Denmark’s involvement in enslavement and its colonialist pursuits in the Caribbean, the movement did not manage to inspire a reckoning of Danish colonization of Africans in the Caribbean.

Public Resonance

The aforementioned hostile environment that has evolved in Denmark over the past decade and a half are the backdrop against which BLM mobilization took place. As we shall see below, despite some

uphill battles, especially around a hostile and racist portrayal of Bwalya Sørensen by the media, BLM activists managed to cultivate a moment of reckoning in Denmark, and prompted a discussion on racism and the legacy of colonialism and slavery that had previously been silenced.

To study the media debate on BLM, we systematically analyzed 121 newspaper articles that discussed the movement in Denmark and the issue of racism from May 26 to July 13 in two mainstream national Danish newspapers: the liberal *Information* (50 articles), and the more conservative *Jyllands-Posten* (71 articles).

The first important finding is the extent of the coverage of the movement at a time when other topics, such as the Corona crisis, competed for public attention. Moreover, the movement was exceptionally successful at gaining standing and having a voice in the media. In previous studies, we found that movement activists are largely silenced in media debates, especially when they belong to stigmatized groups (Milman 2014). In contrast, in the coverage of BLM in Denmark, nearly a quarter of all articles (24%) included direct quotes from people with minority background, and 13% of all direct quotes were from BLM activists. While the latter figure is lower in comparison to the standing of authority figures (quotes by police and politicians were present in 18% of the articles), it is nevertheless a significant media presence for the movement.

This achievement notwithstanding, the coverage in *Jyllands-Posten* included many negative characterizations of the movement, primarily arguing that the movement impinges on Danish freedom of speech (14%), and that their anti-racist arguments amount to a form of reverse racism (14%). Overall, 54% of the articles in *Jyllands-Posten* included a negative representation of either the movement's style or the movement's argument (as violent, too radical, petulant, hurting free speech, engaging in reverse racism, and the like). This was a much smaller issue in *Information*, with only 12% of the coverage portraying the movement negatively. In total, the negative portrayal of activists and their claims in both newspapers accounted for 36% of all articles in our sample.

However, when accounting for frames dominating media debate, we can see another significant achievement for the movement. The great majority of articles (59%) grappled with racism in Denmark, acknowledged its existence, and advocated for change. As we might expect, this frame was more prevalent in *Information* (76%) than in *Jyllands-Posten* (46%). When accounting for the aspects of racism discussed by media actors, we can see that *Information* emphasized structural racism in 40% of all articles analyzed. *Information* repeated and positively echoed activists' frame bridging between racism against PoC and anti-immigrant resentment that especially targets refugees and Muslim migrants in Denmark (22%). In contrast, *Jyllands-Posten* addressed structural racism in 14% of their coverage, and the experience of refugees and migrants appeared in less than 6% of articles in *Jyllands-Posten*.

The opposing frame that denies racism in Denmark was present in just over a quarter of all coverage (26%), and fell again along similar lines: while 35% of the articles in *Jyllands-Posten* expressed the view that racism is not a serious issue in Denmark, only 14% of the articles in *Information* made that argument. One strand in the denial of racism in *Jyllands-Posten* posited that racism is essentially an American issue, and that Danish minorities have nothing to complain about in comparison to African-Americans (11% of the articles). While the amplification of this message by *Jyllands-Posten* had the effect of discrediting the movement and its claims, it nevertheless echoed the arguments and sentiments of the movement's leaders in interviews and materials published by the movement.

Another way in which the movement was successful in shaping public discourse was on the topic of Denmark's legacy of colonialism. Albeit through mixed messages (that predictably split along editorial lines), the fact that the movement forced a reckoning with colonialism and managed to make the otherwise silenced issue suddenly present in media debates is notable. More than a fifth of all articles (22%) addressed Denmark's history of colonialism. This rise in coverage was prompted by actions that targeted statues of figures central to the colonialist past.

The controversy about Denmark's (forgotten) colonialist legacy was covered equally in both newspapers analyzed; the terms of the discussion, however, differed. Forty percent of the articles discussing colonialism in *Jyllands-Posten* argued that former colonial subjects should be grateful for Western or Danish colonization (8% of all *Jyllands-Posten* articles). None of the articles in *Information* made such arguments. Still, despite the bifurcated discussion of colonialism in the news media, we contend that in a social context where the specter of colonialism is largely absent from public discourse, the fact that such attention was given to the issues of colonialism, slavery and their present-day legacies is a major achievement of the movement in shaping public discourse and consciousness.

Conclusion

Despite newspaper coverage that gave the movement a voice and conveyed its message, there was also an unmistakably negative tone in some of the publications. Often, Bwalya Sørensen was the one attracting many of the attacks, as she became a symbol of the movement and its claims. Some media outlets used racist stereotypes and vile language in their treatment of Sørensen. It all culminated in January 2021 when *Jyllands-Posten* published – and later retracted – a caricature that was widely condemned as racist. The fact that such a vile caricature was published is unfortunate, but the fact that all of the anti-racist organizations rallied around Sørensen and succeeded in pressuring *Jyllands-Posten* to remove the image from its publication

is remarkable. In terms of political change, there have been some expressions of solidarity by Danish politicians, but they have been non-committal. Moreover, although the movement lobbied for the adoption of an anti-discrimination plan as part of the 2021 budget, and despite concerted effort by a large coalition of anti-racist organizations, the government declined. Nevertheless, the movement is still working together in trying to pass the plan in the parliament.

In Greenland, the protest against the memorialization of Hans Egede did lead to some changes. Although the city residents voted in 2020 to leave the statue in place, the city decided to cancel the celebration of the 300th anniversary of Egede's arrival in Greenland in 2021. Mayor Charlotte Ludvigsen cited the summer's events in the decision to cancel the celebrations and instead use the allocated budget for a celebration of the city's founding.

It remains to be seen what the long-term impact of the BLM mobilization in the summer of 2020 will be in terms of cultural, social and political changes in Denmark, and in terms of the structure and strength of the anti-racist movement. However, it is already safe to say that this was a critical moment for the movement in building its strategy, articulating its messages, recruiting new members and supporters, building alliances, and shaping public discourse. There is still much more work to be done to combat racism in Denmark, but the achievements of the movement so far are no small feat.

6. “Stop Calling Me the M-Word”: BLM in Poland¹³

The Polish BLM mobilization reveals an interesting interplay between international diffusion and local political and discursive opportunities. Political debates in the spring and summer of 2020 were dominated by a fierce political conflict about LGBTIQ+ rights that overshadowed the public attention for the BLM mobilizations in the country. Still, there were 17 BLM protests in eleven cities organized by a new generation of activists. While the number of protests is generally lower than in other countries studied, it is still significant and unexpected given the local social and political context.

There are several reasons for the comparatively small number of protests. First of all, Poland neither has a history of overseas colonies nor a significant Black community in terms of numbers. The number of people of African descent in Poland was estimated in 2011 to be as low as 2,500 (Kubicki 2011). While the number has surely increased in the last decade, we do not expect it to be much higher. Consequently, the topic of anti-Black racism is rarely debated in the broader public. This does not mean, of course, that we cannot observe racism in Poland. On the contrary, racist and anti-migrant attitudes are widespread, and fomenting prejudice can fall on fertile ground. But, antisemitism, for instance, plays an incomparably more significant role in the public discourse than anti-Black racism does (Pankowski 2018). The same holds true for anti-Muslim racism. For example, during the so-called refugee crisis in 2015, and despite the fact that refugees did not seek asylum in Poland, right-wing politicians fueled anti-Muslim racism, leading to some violent incidents (Pędziwiatr 2017).

One of the interviewees even identified this anti-refugee atmosphere as a reason for the absence of significant mobilization by PoC in Poland. An American woman living in Poland who has organized a series of BLM events in Poland stated:

“I know in Wrocław, it was, I think 2017 or 18, there was an Egyptian-owned pizza place where

someone threw a Molotov cocktail through the window. ... [T]here’s a very big reason why there isn’t any kind of either POC or migrant organization in Poland, because the right wing is wild, and also more concerning, the right wing has the support of the government” (P6).

While a right-wing, nationalist climate hindered public activism of PoC, anti-fascists and other progressive ally groups that have opposed Polish racism since the interwar period also only scarcely picked up on the BLM frame. There is one exception: The organizers of the third BLM event in Warsaw were anti-racist organizers and referred to anti-racist traditions in their statements.

A second reason for the relatively small number of protest events in Poland is related to the election cycle. The Polish presidential election was postponed from May 10 to June 28, 2020 due to the pandemic. Accordingly, the Polish BLM protests took place during and were overshadowed by the election campaign period, which – in the context of minority rights and their discrimination – focused primarily on the LGBTIQ+ community. Indeed, the incumbent and candidate of the *Law and Justice* party (Prawo i Sprawiedliwość), Andrzej Duda, positioned his opposition to ‘LGBT ideology’ centrally in his campaign. In June 2020, for example, he regularly claimed at campaign rallies that ‘LGBT ideology’ was a greater threat to Poland than Communism was in the past, or that “LGBT are not people, they are an ideology” (Applebaum 2020). This ‘culture war’ has been intensified by the ultra-conservative government camp and sympathetic media since 2019 and reached its peak at the end of June 2020, when some LGBTIQ+ activists adopted illegal direct action tactics against the intensification of homophobic propaganda in public space. Trucks covered in anti-LGBTIQ+ slogans and spreading homophobic messages via loudspeakers were stopped and damaged, or (also religious) statues were draped in rainbow flags. The media reported widely on this escalation of conflicts around sexual

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identity. When one of the LGBTIQ+ activists involved in such actions was to be arrested at the beginning of August, hundreds of protesters tried to thwart this through acts of civil disobedience. This protest and the subsequent solidarity demonstrations were met with heavy repression by the Polish police. Video footage showed physical force against peaceful and defenseless LGBTIQ+ activists and initiated a public debate (Douglas 2020). Therefore, protests against police violence in Poland in the summer of 2020 did not target racism but the context of homophobia.

The Protest Wave

All 17 BLM protests in Poland took place between May 31 and June 10 and mostly in large cities: Warsaw, Wrocław, Kraków, and Poznań had more than one event each; the only protests in small and medium-sized towns were recorded in Zielona Góra and Grudziądz. Street marches in city centers were the dominant form of action. In two cases, events involved a lie-in performance that enacted the death of George Floyd. Various events took place near the U.S. embassy or consulate. Protesters wore black clothes, lit candles, and left their banners in front of the building. The number of participants varied considerably: from small gatherings of a few dozen participants in Grudziądz, to around 100 in Katowice, to 2,000 in Warsaw and 3,000 in Poznań (the latter estimate comes from the organizers). It is noteworthy that the biggest event referred to last was organized by a group of friends with no experience in activism. The protest organizers did not report open hostility from the police and no serious problems related to COVID-19 restrictions. In fact, organizers were satisfied with the cooperation and even praised the work of the police:

“There were several police vans, very heavily armed police forces, but everything was very peaceful, as they were there to protect us. Because, as we know, Poland is very divided in this respect and they were there for us, not to disturb us” (P3).

Libertarian and extreme-right groups organized minor counter-demonstrations with “All Lives Matter” banners, yet there were no interactions (like shouting at each other) or conflicts. Occasionally, unorganized bystanders reacted, sometimes in a

vulgar way, to the protesters. In Poznań, for instance, one person was shouting at the demonstration, but was quickly silenced. However, major hostilities were expressed in social media, where people criticized organizers for bringing problems from the U.S. to Poland and blamed them for spreading leftist ideologies.

Organizational Structure & Strategies

In Poland, BLM events were organized on a decentralized basis, without national coordination of the events. Albeit the left-wing party *Razem* was a co-organizer of two demonstrations (in Szczecin and as a member of the protest coalition in Warsaw), the party did not coordinate those events at all. Even at the local level, coordination of events was marginal, as the example of Warsaw illustrates: Even though there were only two days between the second and third event in Warsaw, the organizers spoke only once, without even discussing joint action. Furthermore, some organizers even admitted openly to not knowing much about BLM protests in other Polish cities:

“I can only talk about the Warsaw protest that happened before, and ours. I don’t know if I can add anything more” (P2).

In addition to a marked fragmentation and decentralization, most protests were organized by individuals and did not rely on organizational structures. Those few organizations involved had not been working on the issue of racism prior to their participation in BLM. Only two organizers had a history of anti-racist and anti-fascist activism: (1) the *Przychodnia Squat* on May 31, and (2) an anti-racist coalition on June 6, both in Warsaw. The latter, the *Warsaw Allied Against Racism* coalition, is the only truly experienced social movement organization, with a history that spans five years of anti-fascist demonstrations and campaigning. The coalition links different Warsaw-based left-wing groups (feminists, anarchists, socialists, trade unionists, etc.).

First-time organizers, predominantly young, middle-class women with social ties or affinity to the U.S., were responsible for most of the events. In Szczecin, even though the local chapter of *Razem* officially organized the event, the organizers’ primary

motivations were family connections to the U.S. and the experience of living there, and migration biography, respectively. In Warsaw, a Polish-American activist organized one of the protests, while in other cities, organizers had friends from racialized or ethnic minorities. While the protest organizers were mostly new to the field of anti-racism and also protest organization, the first-time organizers interviewed mentioned their previous participation in the Women's Strikes or Climate Marches in Poland.

Although leaders of political parties did not participate in the organization of the protests as such, some parliamentary deputies did participate, occasionally also as speakers, specifically from the liberal-left *Wiosna* (Spring) in Poznań, Katarzyna Ueberhan; in Szczecin, Katarzyna Kotula; and in Zielona Góra, Anita Kucharska-Dziedzic. Franciszek Sterczewski, an independent deputy connected with the liberal-right Platforma Obywatelska (Civic Platform), participated and gave a speech in Poznań.

Claims and Framing

The major frame of the protests was "Black Lives Matter," which according to the interviewees, was primarily used to indicate solidarity with the U.S. movement. Speakers and participants used slogans imported from the U.S. protests, such as "No Justice No Peace," "I can't breathe," "Silence is violence," and "Protest Black Lives." They were usually written and shouted in English, not Polish. Thus, some organizers underlined their personal connections with the U.S. (family relations, own experience of living in the U.S., etc.):

"The important thing that encouraged me to organize this is that since 2015 my life has been very much connected to the U.S. because my parents work there" (P4).

Others felt that they had an obligation to help PoC or represent their issues as they heard of their plight:

"... a friend wrote to me that he was shocked by what was happening [in the U.S.] ... He said that something needs to be done, a big protest so that people know what is happening. Wrocław is the European Capital of Culture and we must do something..." (P2).

Despite the focus on the U.S., protesters also attempted to link racism in the U.S. with racism and discrimination in Poland. One organizer pointed to the experience of her friend:

"He's a racial minority person, he's been through a lot as a result of that, at the school we both went to, and at home" (P3).

The second important connection to local issues was police brutality. Here, two widely discussed cases were mentioned regularly. The first example had no connection to racism: In 2016, Wrocław police tortured and murdered Igor Stachowiak, a young man they mistook for a drug dealer. Protests and even riots followed this incident. The second case referred to the shooting of the Black street vendor Maxwell Itoya in Warsaw in 2010. The killing was an example of racial prejudice in the police force:

"The Maxwell Itoya murder case itself also showed this [racism]. I doubt that if it were a Polish sock-seller, a police officer would have used a firearm against someone selling clothing illegally" (P2).

Both incidents were used as arguments to underline that anti-Black racism and police brutality were not unknown for Poles. At the same time, organizers were conscious that the issue of racism in Poland is marginalized in public debates, mainly because of the low public visibility of racialized minorities and PoC:

"So in my opinion, first of all, our society is very homogeneous. The percentage of Black people is really very small. A lot of people were negative about our protest because they have never been a victim of racism or witnessed racism themselves" (P1).

Another localized frame of the BLM protest was the question of the usage of the traditional word for Black people in Polish. 'Murzyn' bears negative racial connotations related to colonialism. Accordingly, a home-made banner with "Stop calling me Murzyn" (original spelling) caught the attention of the print and social media. The slogan critiqued traditional, racist kindergarten rhymes and

elementary school readings, sometimes still used in Poland. As one activist said:

“People completely do not understand it. For them, it is a childhood rhyme, something pleasant, funny, and they do not understand that it can negatively affect our perception of Black people in Poland” (P4).

The frames used during the BLM protests in Poland had explicit diagnostic (“racism kills”) and motivational (global solidarity) elements, yet they lacked a prognostic task other than a call for a nondescript justice. There were, for example, no proposals for changes in the regulations concerning the police in Poland. References to other forms of racism, such as anti-Muslim racism, were largely absent. This was surprising, as the so-called European refugee crisis of 2015 was the last major debate on racism and xenophobia in Poland. There was also no mention of the treatment of the huge number of migrants from Ukraine, who often live and work in precarious conditions (Filipek & Polkowska 2020). Against this background, the June 2020 protests in Poland unfolded as spontaneous and transnationally oriented expressions of anger and solidarity with events in the U.S., rather than a part of an organized anti-racist campaign. The “Stop calling me Murzyn” slogan was an exception here, as it implied a change to the school curricula in Poland. This might be one reason why public debates focused on this aspect of national reference: In fact, the longest article in the Polish BLM press coverage was dedicated to it.

Public Resonance

The Polish BLM protests hardly generated media interest. Therefore, while there has been regular coverage of the BLM protests in the U.S., Poland’s two leading daily newspapers prove how small the Polish BLM protests have been perceived. The conservative *Rzeczpospolita*, considered the number one opinion-forming medium, published about 65 articles on BLM outside of Poland and only two articles on demonstrations in Poland. It did not report any of the street protests, only about graffiti sprayed on a Kościuszko monument on June 3 and 7. The Warsaw local supplement of the liberal *Gazeta Wyborcza*, Poland’s most widely circulated

daily newspaper (after the tabloid *Fakt*), wrote about this incident three times.

The choice of words used in the reporting in both newspapers shows that the ‘attack’ on a national hero met with little goodwill. A small and easily removable graffiti inscription “Black Lives Matter” was labelled as “destruction” or “vandalism.” As a result, after an intensive investigation, police arrested a 22-year-old suspect in late June 2020, who may face up to five years in prison for damaging a monument.

Only one article in *Gazeta Wyborcza* was more balanced and tried to discuss the events around the monument. On June 4, it reproduced the criticism of left-wing politicians who point out that it is wrong to speak of “vandalism.” Kościuszko was not only a warrior for independence (in Poland and the U.S.), but advocated the abolition of slavery. Therefore, the left-wing magazine *Krytyka Polityczna* raised the idea of adding an appropriate notice to the monument. After all, *Krytyka Polityczna* argues, if Kościuszko were alive, he would have supported BLM’s ideals. A poll on the liberal *Gazeta Wyborcza* website shows how unpopular such ideas are, since 90% rejected the proposal.

The Polish BLM protests, which took the form of street demonstrations, were covered in eleven articles in the local sections of *Gazeta Wyborcza* and one in the newspaper’s general section. In contrast, the BLM movement was referred to in an international context in over 220 entries. It is noticeable that articles focusing on the Polish BLM protests are always short; sometimes, there are only photographs from the protests with a few commenting sentences. Furthermore, the articles were often written in advance, based on the Facebook pages of the forthcoming protest events. Nevertheless, some recurring patterns of protest description are noticeable.

First of all, it was pointed out that the demonstrators observed rules of hygiene, despite demonstrations being banned at the time. Furthermore, protests were said to have been peaceful and ‘civilized’; for example, participants waited at traffic lights and did not disrupt traffic. According to the coverage,

the police also reiterated that there had been no incidents. These points are apparently intended to counter accusations that BLM is violent; it should not be forgotten that in our sample only the left-liberal *Gazeta Wyborcza* reported on the protests, which may be an explanation for the positive coverage. In contrast, the public and right-wing media in Poland reported mainly on the violence and looting during the BLM protests in the U.S.

Moreover, in our sample, the dominant perception was that the protests were focused on events in the U.S. This was reflected in the dominance of English posters, to which reference was made (as evidenced by corresponding photos). According to participants and organizers, who were quoted in the coverage, the protests took place in solidarity with BLM protests in the U.S. It was also not uncommon for U.S. citizens living in Poland to be interviewed during the events.

The reports also referred to the local context of the protests. When it came to the issue of racism, however, this usually remained very vague. Protesters were quoted as saying that racism was not only the problem of the U.S. but could be encountered worldwide, and thus also in Poland. Reference to personal experiences and especially the experiences of Black acquaintances or friends was made only rarely. Instead, the reports connected the BLM protests to police violence in Poland. They mentioned the two examples that were also brought up during the interviews (namely, Igor Stachowiak and Maxwell Itoya).

Finally, the liberal media emphasized that mostly young people (pupils and students) had organized and attended the protests. This was also an expression of the conviction that progressive civil society forces are to be found primarily among the young, adolescent generation of Poles. This is also the argument of the only commentary published in the aftermath of the Polish BLM

protests, which argued that the face of Polish democracy is young and female.

Conclusion

The BLM protests in the U.S. scarcely resonated in the Polish protest arena and were mostly organized on a decentralized basis by individuals without previous experience in protest organizing or anti-racism. Accordingly, media coverage was also limited. Nevertheless, the protests initialized a debate on anti-Black racism in Poland. As one of the organizers noted:

“[The protests made] people more aware. Schools do not teach us that something is wrong, so protests, crowds of people on the streets, are signals that something is worth considering and makes us examine our actions” (P3).

Despite these effects on civil society and some resonance in a broader public, the protests did not reach a mass audience. This can only partly be understood by the Polish demographic, with its small populations of racialized or ethnic minorities and the absence of an established anti-racist movement. Instead, we argue that the relative weakness of the BLM campaign in Poland is better explained by parallel social conflicts and activist struggles that overshadowed the BLM movement’s core claims (the fight against discrimination and police violence). During the summer of 2020, the Polish LGBTIQ+ community had to deal with extensive discrimination and harsh police measures. Since autumn 2020, this is also true for the feminist protests in Poland.¹⁴ Consequently, the progressive civil society forces were occupied with the fight against the government’s illiberal and discriminatory policies. In this strained situation, resources for sustaining a BLM campaign were limited, and hence, the mobilization capacity remained weak. The extent to which the new activists can provide further impetus for the Polish anti-racist movement remains to be seen.

¹⁴ The topic of police violence against protestors became a major issue in public discourse during the last – and so far biggest – wave of feminist protests in Poland, after police were ordered to crack down hard on the demonstrators (The Independent 2020; Bujara 2021).

7. Patterns of Anti-Racist Protest in Europe: Comparative Conclusions

In this conclusion, we develop a comparative overview of similarities and differences across cases. During our project, it became clear that we cannot understand the patterns of diffusion and local adoption of the BLM protest without taking into consideration the history of anti-racist mobilizations and progressive movements, pre-existing debates on racism and migration, and the countries' colonial past and its public remembrance. Patterns of racist attacks and violence in the respective societies are also a recurring point of reference. These are all factors that shape the scope, frames and resonance of the protest. Our comparative overview ends with some observations of the consequences of the mobilization, while being fully aware that the outcomes of protest cycles are notoriously difficult to measure. This, however, also leaves enough room for future research on BLM mobilization.

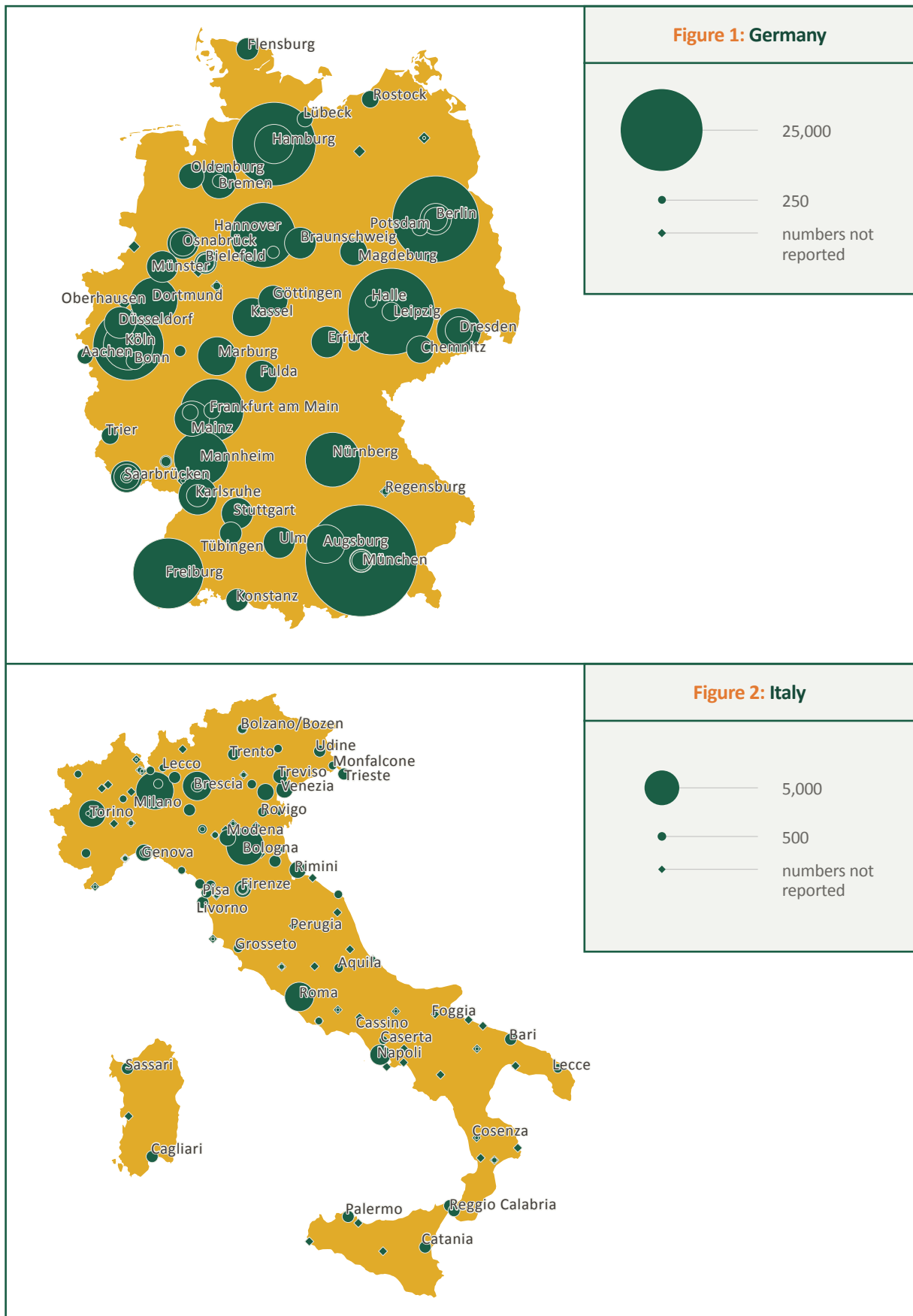
Starting in the U.S., the BLM protests quickly spread around the world, leading to hundreds of demonstrations in Europe. Tactics, frames and symbols were transnationally diffused, and subsequently translated to the specific social and cultural contexts with their legacies of anti-racist struggle in the various countries. For Italy, Denmark and Germany, our data documents wide geographical reach of the protests (see figures 1–4, below)¹⁵, which spread to both large cities as well as small towns, and attracted thousands of participants, many of them first-time participants. In these countries, the media covered the protests extensively, and gave activists, and in particular Black activists, racialized, ethnic and/or religious minorities an unusual platform to express their grievances and demands. One exception to this wide reach in our sample is Poland, which had only a few demonstrations in the largest cities, with the topic receiving little media coverage. Part of the explanation for the Polish exception can be found in the smaller Black and PoC communities and the preoccupation of the Polish left with LGBTIQ+ rights during the summer of 2020.

In terms of framing, we saw, on the one hand, a clear reference to the U.S. context in all countries we studied. The common use of English slogans, including “I can’t breathe” and “Black Lives Matter,” the ‘silent demonstrations’ that referred to the duration of Floyd’s agony, and the frequent demonstrations in front of U.S. embassies, are some examples. On the other hand, we also observed varying degrees of frame bridging that adapted anti-racist messages to the local context. Activists in both Italy and Denmark made connections to the fate of refugees and migrants. The Polish and German protests referred to local cases of (racist) police brutality, and in Denmark, the BLM protests were connected to structural racism in the police (though not police brutality). The German and Italian protests emphasized structural racism in their respective societies, whereas in the Danish protests and media coverage, individual racism was more central. We assume that the movement’s ability to articulate an elaborate and structural critique of racism is a product of its maturity – both in terms of organizational strength and its existence over time – and of the public’s openness to receiving such claims. Some factors that affect public receptiveness to claims about racism are society’s concepts of nationhood and colonial legacies. While Poland does not have a history of overseas colonialism, the three other countries were involved in colonialism, and in all three the issue was taken up by the protests.

One key question regarding social movements addresses the consequences and outcomes of the protest wave. Consequences can be manifold, can become manifest in various forms and dimensions, and are often more long-term and indirect in nature. What is more, they are part of continuous struggles over interpretation within the movement and outside. In the following, we summarize some observations from our pilot study that also pave the way for future research on BLM and anti-racist mobilization more broadly.

¹⁵ We appreciate the support of Joscha Kükenshöner.

Figures 1–4: Geographical Scope and Number of Participants of BLM Protests in Germany, Italy, Denmark and Poland



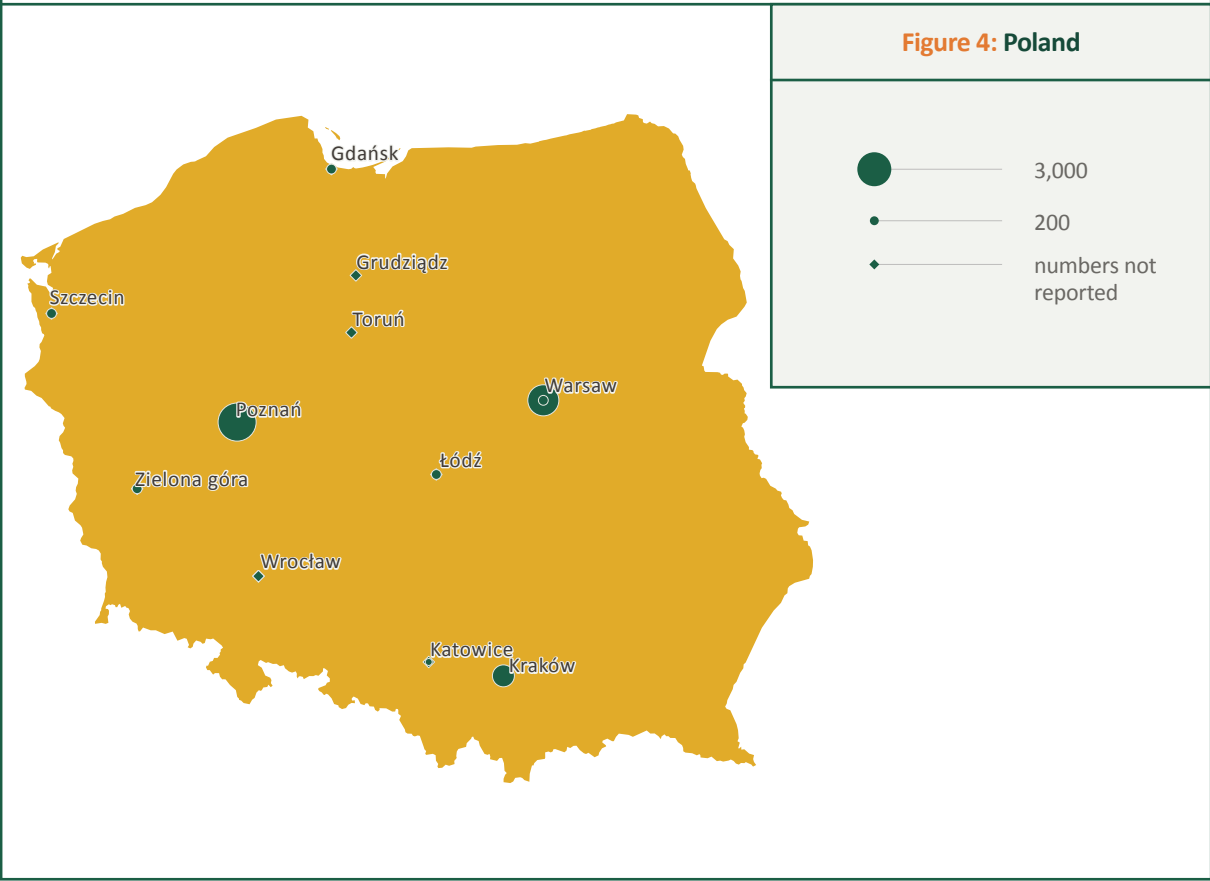
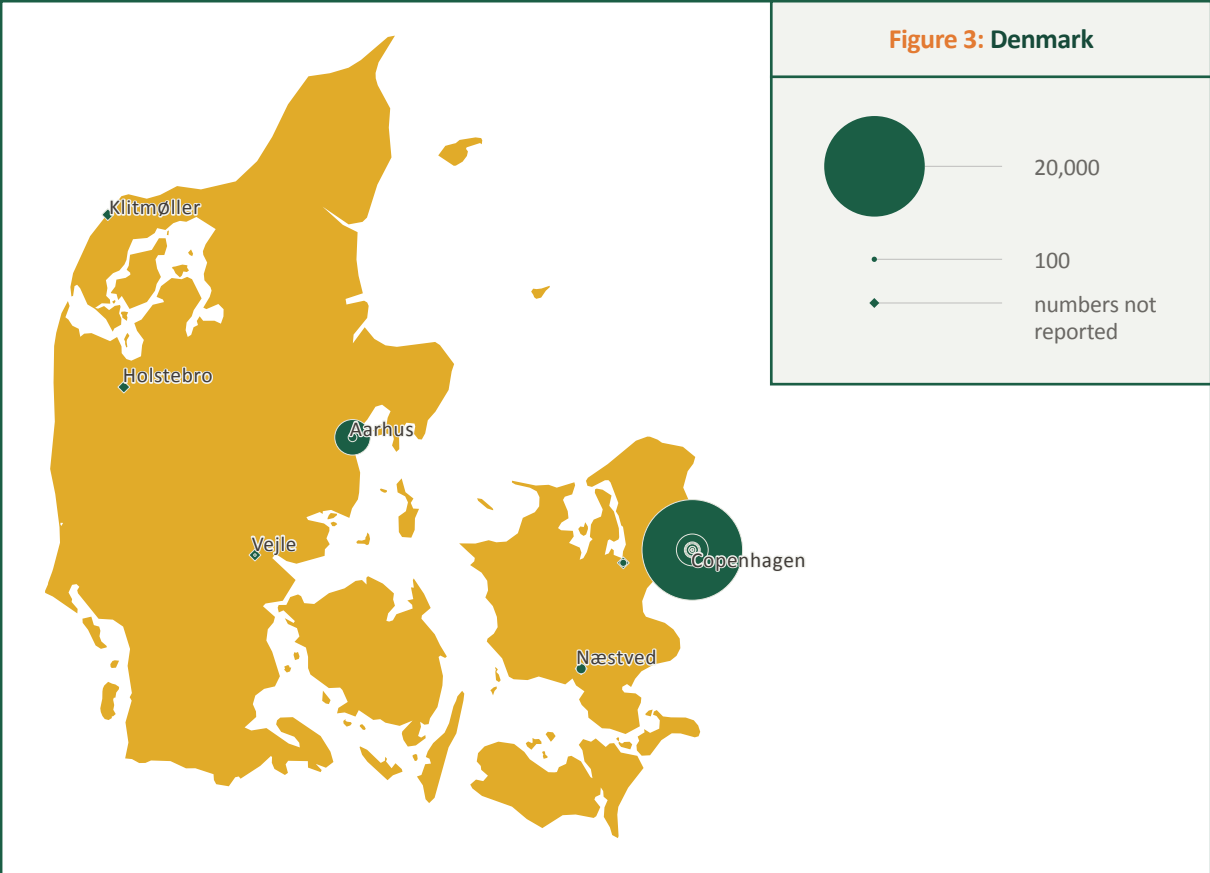


Figure 5 shows the evolution of the protest activities in the weeks following Floyd’s death. In Table 1, we compare the scope in terms of the overall number of protest events and the number of their participants.

Figure 5: Numbers of BLM Protests in Germany, Italy, Denmark and Poland

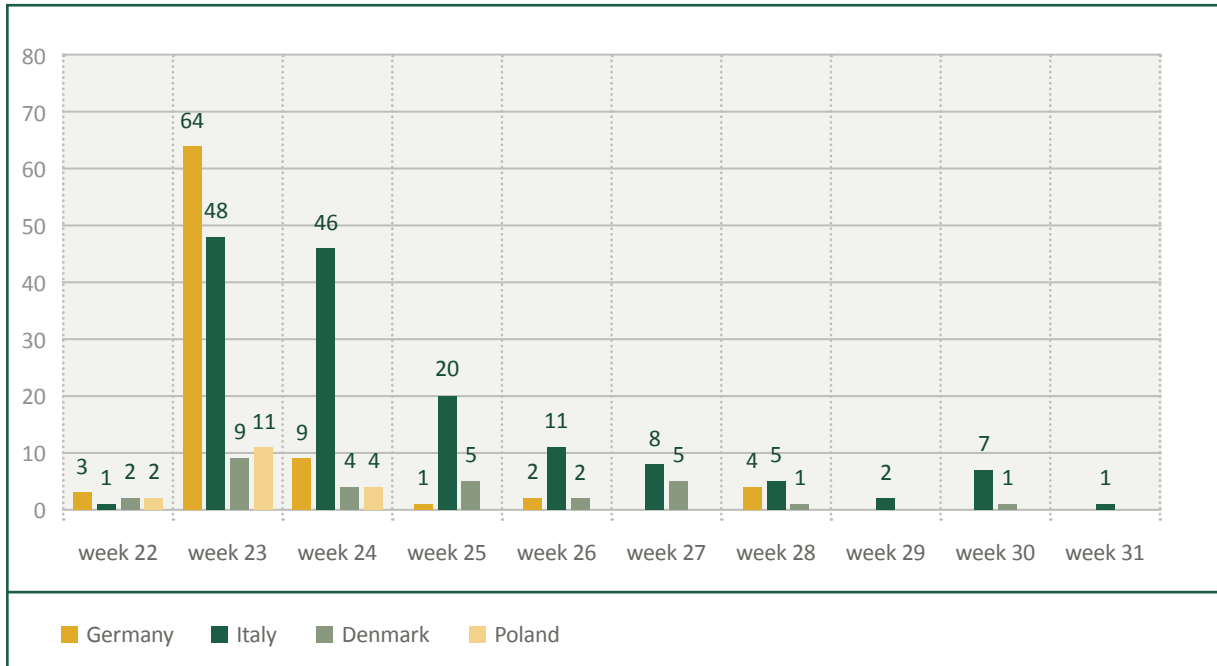


Table 1: Number of BLM Protests and Protest Participants in Germany, Italy, Denmark and Poland

	Germany	Italy	Denmark	Poland
Number of protest events	83	149	29	17
Number of participants overall	198,750	43,910	27,397	7,100
Average number of participants at event*	2,839	578	1522	789
Protesters per 100,000 inhabitants	239	73	471	18

* Only calculated for protest events with reported numbers of participants

Awareness of the colonial past: The colonial past and the politics of its remembrance were key issues for the protestors. Here we could observe immediate effects of the protests in raising awareness of the topic, which led in several cases to changes in offensive street and product names. In Italy, for instance, the colonial past, hardly debated, was thematized during the protests that built upon recent experiences of anti-racist movements resisting the backlash discourses and policies of Salvini's League in power. In all relevant national contexts, changes in the politics of remembrance are still ongoing. In Denmark, for example, while the activists were very successful in raising awareness of Danish colonization in Greenland through a series of direct actions, they did not manage to inspire a reckoning with Danish colonization of Africans in the Caribbean. In all countries, the BLM protests seemed to trigger a politicization of the denunciations of oppressive ideologies and racism connected to past colonial empires and their present legacy.

Organizational infrastructure and patterns of alliances: In all countries we could observe that the protest wave of 2020 led to the creation of some new organizations and new patterns of alliance formation. In Poland, most of the organizers were young activists, or Americans who live in the country, or others with personal connections to the U.S. The movement in Italy was able to form unique coalitions with the feminist and environmentalist movements, which had already massively mobilized in the previous year, and in Denmark, the movement managed to improve internal coordination between the different segments of the anti-racist movement. Germany also saw the strengthening of Black activism in the heterogeneous anti-racist mobilization and the formation of networks between newly emerging organizations. All countries saw the involvement of formerly non-active individuals, albeit to various degrees. These developments have the potential not only to shape future anti-racist mobilization within the different countries but also to shape

progressive mobilization and its role in impacting politics in the near and more distant future.

Empowerment effects: One aspect that is often overlooked when it comes to the impact of protest mobilizations is the effect on the protestors themselves. Protest is not only about changing the political or economic context but also about changing identities and collective as well as personal ways of thinking and acting. Self-empowerment is an important topic for the BLM movement and was mentioned in interviews across all four countries. Whether there will be more long-lasting effects on the biographies and lives of the protestors remains to be seen.

Policy impact: Questions of impacts on movements' policy are the most difficult to answer at this stage. One reason is that political decision making is a complex and lengthy process. In the case of BLM protests, it is too early to assess policy impacts. And yet, some recent changes seem to be influenced by the BLM protest mobilizations and the focus on racism they produced. Particularly in the German case, many argue that the extensive list of measures¹⁶ published by the "Kabinettsausschuss zur Bekämpfung von Rechtsextremismus und Rassismus" (Cabinet Committee for Combating Right-Wing Extremism and Racism) would not have been possible, at least not in this form, without the pressure from the streets. At the level of the European Union, the European Parliament formulated a resolution with explicit reference to the anti-racist protests following the death of George Floyd as well as adopted the EU Anti-Racism Action Plan 2020–2025.¹⁷

Further medium-term and long-term political impacts remain to be seen. One key open question regarding future mobilization and consequences of the protests is the cultural, social and political changes within the European Union and its member states. Further assessment of the social, cultural and political impact of the BLM protests in Europe

¹⁶ See Die Bundesregierung 2020.

¹⁷ In the document, the parliament "supports the recent massive protests in European capitals and cities all around the world against racism and discrimination following the death of George Floyd; highlights the protestors' call to take a stand against oppression and structural racism in Europe; and expresses solidarity, respect and support for the peaceful protests" (European Parliament 2020:7).

will require exploring whether the coordination within and across movements, but also coalitions and relationships with other actors in society, including parties or academic institutions, are maintained over time. This includes the question of whether the new cadre of organizers will become an integral part of the anti-racist movement, and whether and how today's protest participants

use their power through other channels to shape society. Furthermore, it is open to what degree the transnational anti-racist protest catalyst of George Floyd's death will translate into sustainable anti-racist activism in Europe with a dual reference: addressing solidarity with anti-racist campaigns abroad and mobilizing for change at the local or national level.

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Appendix: List of Interviews

Interview ID	Country	Date	Language
G1	Germany	Nov. 13, 2020	German
G2	Germany	Nov. 17, 2020	German
G3	Germany	Nov. 23, 2020	German
G4	Germany	Dec. 4, 2020	German
G5	Germany	Dec. 14, 2020	German
G6	Germany	Dec. 19, 2020	German
I1	Italy	Dec. 2, 2020	Italian
I2	Italy	Dec. 4, 2020	Italian
I3	Italy	Dec. 5, 2020	Italian
I4	Italy	Dec. 11, 2020	Italian
I5	Italy	Dec. 22, 2020	Italian
I6	Italy	Dec. 30, 2020	Italian
D1	Denmark	Nov. 16, 2020	English
D2	Denmark	Jan. 18, 2021	English
D3	Denmark	Nov. 23, 2020	English
D4	Denmark	Nov. 26, 2020	English
D5	Denmark	Nov. 27, 2020	English
D6	Denmark	Dec. 17, 2020	English
P1	Poland	Dec. 2, 2020	Polish
P2	Poland	Dec. 4, 2020	Polish
P3	Poland	Dec. 7, 2020	Polish
P4	Poland	Dec. 11, 2020	Polish
P5	Poland	Dec. 14, 2020	Polish
P6	Poland	Dec. 20, 2020	Polish

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