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“We might use our position at the bottom, however, to make a clear leap into revolutionary action. If black women were free, it would mean that everyone else would have to be free since our freedom would necessitate the destruction of all the systems of oppression”
Combahée River Collective Statement, 1977

1 In July 2016, the editorial board of the New York Times published an op-ed entitled “Black Lives Matter in France, too”, detailing the death of Adama Traoré after being arrested by the police, and the ensuing protests in Beaumont-sur-Oise, a Parisian suburb. On July 19 2016, Adama, a 24-year-old born in France to Malian immigrants, died after being arrested by police in Beaumont-sur-Oise on what was also his birthday. The police have provided differing explanations for his death, including heart failure or asphyxiation, and ever since Assa and her family have pursued justice, including punishment for the officers involved.

2 The New York Times article discussed how the death was taken up under the banner of Black Lives Matter (BLM) and BLM France, and states the following: “There are important differences between the histories of race relations in the United States and in France, where racist attitudes have roots in France’s colonial past. However, that the Black Lives Matter movement resonates in France should not surprise.”
This resonance has only intensified, especially since the murder in Minneapolis of George Floyd, an African-American, by police officer Derek Chauvin, and the ensuing national and international protests in May 2020. After the video of Chauvin kneeling on Floyd’s neck for almost nine minutes circulated worldwide during a global pandemic, anti-racist demonstrations took place across the U.S., as well as globally, including in France. Yet this “racial reckoning” is only the latest wave in ongoing anti-racist movements in France and elsewhere, including in particular the most recent convergence between mobilization against police violence towards Black Americans, as exemplified in BLM, and mobilization against police violence towards France’s ethno-racial minorities.

In a *New Yorker* article published in June 2020, a few weeks after the death of George Floyd, Assa Traoré said, “We are Black Lives Matter … The two fights echo each other, so that we’re pulling back the curtain on France, in saying, ‘People of the whole world, look what’s happening here.’” She further detailed how she responded to the murder of Floyd, and how it resonated with the death of her own brother, Adama Traoré.

It is crucial to unpack how and why Black Lives Matter, constituted within a socio-political context in the United States, is resonant in France. My use of Black Lives Matter throughout this article refers to the broader social movement, and undergirding ideology, against police violence and affirming Black humanity, not to any specific Black Lives Matter chapter or organization, nor to use of the hashtag #BlackLivesMatter or #BLM. Moreover I argue that examining the role of Black women in anti-racist mobilization more generally, and activism against state violence specifically, both historically and presently in France, illustrates this resonance, as Black women mobilize both on their behalf and on behalf of their communities. As Black women are marginalized across multiple dimensions – namely, race and gender – and in a variety of national settings, understanding how they experience and resist their oppressions illustrates how anti-racist struggles are transnational and global. In this article, based on three years of ethnographic research, including interviews with activists and participant observation at demonstrations and protests in the Paris metropolitan region, I employ a Black feminist theoretical framework to make sense of why and how Black Lives Matter, as both an ideology and a social movement, has reverberated and been refracted in anti-racist struggles in France. In other words, I provide a Black Feminist reading of present anti-racist struggles against police violence.

I argue that a Black feminist lens clarifies how Black and Maghrebin-origin women, including Assa Traoré and Ramata Dieng, are leading this movement, amid the disproportionate deaths of Black and Maghrebin-origin men at the hands of the police (Jobard and Lévy 2009). As men are disproportionately victims of police violence, women – as sisters, mothers, etc. – are doing much of the mobilization against this social problem.¹ In this way, we can describe police violence as both a racial and a gendered phenomenon. I argue that the unique standpoint (Hill Collins 1986) of Black and Maghrebin-origin women as women of color, sisters, mothers, daughters, and aunts also characterizes the transnational solidarity these women activists forge with Black Lives Matter and Black Feminist activists around the world, including Angela Davis, Opal Tometi, and the late Marielle Franco. More broadly, such a Black Feminist perspective is essential to understanding contemporary racism in postcolonial France.
In what follows, I first discuss the methods I employ in this study, including my own positionality as a Black American woman ethnographer engaged in this research. I then discuss the continued significance of a Black Feminist lens, including standpoint theory and intersectional activism, and transnational blackness. I then discuss how Black women activists in France are mobilizing against police violence, including how they interpret and connect with Black Lives Matter (BLM) in the U.S. I conclude with the broader implications for the relevance of Black Feminism for understanding racism and contemporary anti-racist struggles and the relevance of BLM outside of the U.S.

**Methods: Doing a Black Feminist ethnography as a Black American woman**

My analysis throughout this article is based upon ongoing ethnographic research in the Parisian metropolitan region, which I began in 2017. I have conducted 25 interviews with activists involved, broadly speaking, in mobilization against police violence, including individuals who are associated with different collectifs or organizations and with friends and family members of victims of police violence. The bulk of this research involves participant observation at demonstrations and protests related to police violence and anti-racism, meetings and events for different collectifs and organizations, activist training sessions, and other types of events. I identified and connected with different collectifs and activists through existing networks and social media pages. I also employed snowball sampling (Small 2009) to generate a wider set of interlocuters.

My approach both in this article and in my ethnographic research in France employs a Black Feminist epistemology, in which I acknowledge my positionality as a Black woman, U.S. citizen, and non-French person. Here, I am influenced by Patricia Hill Collins’s (1986) conceptualization of the “outsider-within” which has been useful in theorizing how I have been simultaneously constructed as both an insider and outsider when conducting fieldwork. As I have illustrated elsewhere, throughout my fieldwork interlocuters constructed me as an outsider due to my status as a non-French person and U.S. citizen, and as an insider due to my status as a Black person (and Black woman specifically) (Beaman 2019; see also Bickerstaff 2012). Thus, my positionality and multiple statuses are directly implicated in conducting this research.

In analyzing both race and racism, and Black Lives Matter in France, I acknowledge the oft-referenced “dangers” in doing so, as French Republican ideology disavows the salience of race as a category, and racism as a relevant social reality (Célestine and Martin-Breteau 2019; Keaton 2010). The common public discourses about race and ethnicity in France are that race does not exist; France is not equal to the United States with regard to the significance of race; and that France is a colorblind society (Ndiaye 2008). France’s Republican model is seen as contrary to the style of multiculturalism and identity politics present in the U.S, so any connection made between the two societies is seen as dangerous to France’s cohesive, Republican ethos. Relatedly, there have been recent calls within France downplaying the relevance of theories and social movements imported from the U.S like Black Lives Matter and critical race theory (Baril 2017). Moreover, those individuals – scholars, activists, or otherwise – who identify racism in France are charged with being overly influenced by U.S. conceptions...
of race and racism, and falsely importing them into France (Niang 2020). As a U.S.-
based scholar researching race and racism in France, I too have faced this accusation.

Yet, as much Francophone and other research on race, racism, and white supremacy
has demonstrated, not only are these not just U.S. phenomena – or even phenomena
born from the U.S. – they are relevant to, and indeed constitutive, of France itself
(Goldberg 2006; Michel 2020; Peabody and Stovall 2003; Salem and Thompson 2016).
And the histories and experiences of Black people within France illustrate this. Scholars
based both in France and elsewhere have long challenged the honesty of French
Republicanism and universalism in its treatment of Black populations and
understanding of blackness more generally (Alzouma 2011; Boittin 2010; Célestine 2011;
Michel 2020; Thomas 2006).

Black feminism, activism and transnational solidarities

11 Black Feminist thought has been crucial to illustrating the unique standpoint of Black
women, as both Black and women. As articulated by the Combahee River Collective's
statement, “we [Black women] believe that the most profound and potentially most
radical politics come directly out of our own identity, as opposed to working to end
somebody else’s oppression” (Combahee River Collective 1977). As theorized by
sociologist Patricia Hill Collins (1986), Black feminist thought emphasizes the
importance of Black women’s self-valuation and culture, as well as the interlocking
nature of oppression. Intersectionality, as theorized by Kimberlé Crenshaw (1991), Hill
Collins (1986; 2000) and others, stipulates that the experiences of Black women are
shaped by their gender and racial status. In other words, the standpoint of Black
women is an intersection of these oppressions (Harnois 2010). More generally,
individual experiences of oppression are shaped by other statuses and power
relationships. Oppression based on race and gender cannot be separated out and the
acknowledgement of this intersection, illustrated by the standpoint of Black women, is
a radical departure from viewing one oppression or status as fundamental (Hill Collins
2000).

12 The radical politics of Black feminism also engender a unique form of activism. As Hill
Collins (1986) writes: “If Black women simultaneously use all resources available to
them – their roles as mothers, their participation in churches, their support of one
another in Black female networks, their creative expression – to be self-defined and
self-valuating and to encourage others to reject objectification, then Black women’s
everyday behavior itself is a form of activism. People who view themselves as fully
human, as subjects, become activist, no matter how limited the sphere of their activism
may be. By returning subjectivity to Black women, Black feminists return activism as
well” (Hill Collins 1986 : p. 524). In other words, Black women’s unique standpoint is
necessarily an activist position, as Black women have long had to resist multiple forms
of oppression.

13 Moreover, intersectionality and Black feminism can organize our thinking and
understanding of marginalization – and resistance to marginalization – globally.
Considering Black feminism outside of the U.S. requires addressing the “very real
limitations of national boundaries, to develop new ways of relating to one another, in
order to unpack the interconnectedness of Black women’s experiences” (Hill Collins
2000 : 232). Such a perspective illustrates how Black women are continually invisibilized across the African diaspora, and not just in the U.S.

While Black feminist thought is often theorized in the context of the U.S., it is not exclusively so, as extant scholarship on activism, intersectionality and Black and other women of color feminism in Europe has demonstrated (Hill Collins 2015; El Tayeb 2011; Elliott-Cooper 2019; Emegulu and van der Scheer 2022; Florvil 2020; Frank 2019; Lépinard 2020; Mügge et al 2018; Rose 2022; Tormos 2017; Yuval-Davis 2011). Within Europe, colorblind frameworks risk reducing race even in the context of intersectionality (Hill Collins 2015).

And specifically within France there is a long tradition of Black feminist activism, or Afro-feminism, that has long interrogated ideas about both blackness and womanhood – and relatedly a long tradition of writing about Black feminist and Afro-feminist activism within France (Germain and Larcher 2018). One example is the Nardal sisters, Paulette and Jane, whose writings and Clamart salon in Paris were the precursor to the Nègritude movement, even if their contributions have been ignored or dismissed (Othieno and Davis 2019). Their salon was a critical space for the discussion of a “race consciousness,” Black politics and international Black solidarity, and included such figures as Aimé Césaire and Léopold Senghor. This was also a feminist space, as the Nardal sisters were interested in the experiences of Black women globally (Boittin 2010; Joseph-Gabriel 2020; Sharpley-Whiting 2000). Moreover, as Joseph-Gabriel (2020) has argued, Black French women have long engaged in transnational practices in their affirmation of Black liberation and their struggle towards full societal belonging for Black populations, or what she terms “decolonial citizenship.”

Other French Afro-feminist groups, including La Coordination des femmes noires and Le Mouvement pour la Défense des Droits de la Femme Noire (or MODEFEN), and activists, including Rokhaya Diallo and Amandine Gay, have built upon these earlier foundational thinkers to insist upon the relevance of Black feminism and anti-racism more generally in France, and upon the global connections to this activism, amid strong hostility to their work. I am not suggesting that they are all activists in the same way, identify in the same way, or even see themselves as part of the same political movement, but rather I invoke them here to show that present Black feminist activism in France is nothing new. Rather, there are crucial Black and intersectional feminist antecedents to present dynamics.

One contemporary example is the MWASI collectif whose manifesto states: “Our Black Feminism is a political and collective response to a racist, sexist, hetero-patriarchal and capitalist system, and founded in the history of women and Black Feminists who have organized and participated in the fight for freedom and emancipation while contributing to the construction of feminist thought in France, Africa, the Caribbean and throughout the Black diaspora” (Othieno and Davis 2019 : 55). In this way, we can see how Black feminist and intersectional activism has been integral to analyses of racism both in France and globally.

Transnational blackness and BLM in France

Moreover, women’s underpinning of Black social activism and political life extends into the present moment, demonstrating the long and deep roots that inform Black women’s intersectional politics and activism. As both a social media hashtag and a
broader social movement, Black Lives Matter (BLM), in which Black feminist leadership is central, is a critical and crucial intervention against police violence targeting Black populations.

Yet any discussion of the resonance or relevance of BLM in France must acknowledge how it builds upon previous and long-standing anti-racist mobilizations in France and the rest of Europe. As I have argued elsewhere (Beaman 2021), anti-racist activists in France (as well as the rest of Europe) acknowledge solidarity with BLM amid both similar and different contexts of police violence in Europe. For example, in their analysis of activism by women of color throughout Europe, Emelulu and Bassel (2021) conclude, “The Black Lives Matter movement, rather than being an ‘illegitimate’ importation of North American race politics to Europe, is a space of mutual exchange, peer learning and dialogue between Black activists across the globe in which ideas, strategies and tactics are shared.” Considering the transnational resonance of BLM in France requires reckoning with how police violence is also a phenomenon within France, and not just in the U.S. Anti-racist activists contend with both the local specificities of police violence and the global nature of this social problem.

Social movements for Black liberation have always been global and transnational in nature (the Négritude movement being one notable example), and BLM is no exception. At its core, BLM is a call to affirm the humanity of all populations racialized as Black. As one African-American activist, Darnell Moore, explains: “#BlackLivesMatter is a call for all people to wrestle with anti-blackness.” In short, Black Lives Matter as a mantle reflects the idea, as African-American and BLM activist Alicia Garza explained, that “When Black people get free, everybody gets free.”

This, of course, is reminiscent of the Combahee River Collective’s statement, seen as a foundational text in Black feminist thought. Accordingly, “To be recognized as human, levelly human, is enough.” Recognizing Black women’s full humanity – in an anti-Black societal context – is a revolutionary movement in and of itself. In this way, we can see how BLM is a continuation of earlier periods of Black feminist activism. This is the latest iteration of earlier movements towards the freedom of Black populations.

Amid the growing attention to the relevance and resonance of Black Lives Matter outside of the U.S., and especially in Europe (Essif 2015; Joseph-Salisbury et al 2020), there is a growing need for a Black Feminist reading of how Black women outside of the U.S. understand and respond to BLM in their own anti-racist activism (as such Black feminist interpretations have been crucial in making sense of earlier anti-racist movements). Police violence is a racial issue, but race itself as an analytical lens is not sufficient to understand the complexities of this issue, nor is gender; rather an intersectional and a Black feminist perspective are crucial. Such a perspective illustrates how Black women (and other women of color) have long been critical to anti-racist struggles in both France and the rest of Europe. And their activism is based upon their own standpoint and experiences of racism, as well as militating on behalf of their brothers, sons, and other male relatives. This highlights the intersectional location of Black women in this movement, as they are affected because of both their gender and their ethno-racial statuses. They are not mobilizing against a social problem that they uniquely face, but rather one that they face directly (as targets of hyper-policing) and indirectly (as their male counterparts are targeted by police violence).
Moreover, considering the transnational resonance of BLM in France requires a reading of blackness in France, including notions of transnational blackness, or how conceptions of being racialized as Black are at once locally specific and globally expansive. In my analysis, I employ a more expansive definition of blackness, as a socially constructed category of otherness (De Genova 2018). This is similar to what Elisa Joy White (2012) refers to as being part of the African diaspora, due to the shared experiences of being racialized as Black, as well as to Michelle Wright’s (2004) notion of a “Black diasporic consciousness.” Here, I am also influenced by philosopher Tommie Shelby’s (2002) distinction between thin and thick blackness. The thin conception refers to blackness as a vague and socially imposed category of difference based on visible, physical characteristics (such as having dark skin in the case of the United States). The thick conception requires more than physical characteristics and includes an emphasis on shared ancestry and common cultural heritage. Shelby (2002) argues for a Black solidarity that does not privilege an essentialist Black identity, but rather is based upon the shared experience of oppression and the commitment to resist it. Pap Ndiaye (2008) has argued that rather than there being a strong Black community in France, there is a transnational blackness which connects Black individuals in France with Black populations elsewhere. Such a blackness is a product of social relations and interactions.

Therefore, referencing transnational blackness – and transnational solidarities – counters the accusation that BLM is not, or cannot be, relevant to France because the social movement originated in the U.S. Rather, shared experiences of being racialized, and marginalized, as Black forge these connections beyond nation-state borders. Even in different contexts with different colonial and racial histories and legacies, connections among Black populations persist, particularly as they relate to racism and anti-racist activism. Racialization and racism cannot be confined to a single nation-state, as ideas about blackness are continually situated and reinstated globally.

Relatedly, minimizing or downplaying BLM as solely a U.S. movement with no relevance elsewhere further serves to diminish Black Europeans’ own claims of racism. And connections between Black individuals in France and Black Americans are minimized partly as a result of the framing of Black individuals in France as immigrants and not as French-born denizens (El-Tayeb 2011).

Anti-racist activists, including Black women, regularly lead demonstrations for justice for victims of police violence throughout France. As I note based on my ethnographic observations, there are many transnational connections present at these protests, such as “Sans justice, vous n’auriez jamais la paix,” a reference to a chant used in demonstrations for Black Americans, or signs reading “Black Lives Matter” or “BLM” with images of Rosa Parks or Malcolm X.

Black women combatting police violence

Following the death of her younger brother Adama in 2016, as I discussed earlier, Assa, a mother of three kids, started the collectif, Le comité vérité et justice pour Adama leading the movement for justice for Adama, and for what Assa has referred to as the “other Adamsas” or other Black men who are victims of police violence. At one event I attended in June 2017 at Librairie Résistances, a bookstore in Paris’s 17th arrondissement, Assa said
she “hopes to be a voice for all victims of police violence, not just in France, but in the U.S. and elsewhere.”

28 Before Adama’s death, she was working as an éducatrice in Sarcelles, a suburb north of Paris. She has co-written two books, Lettre à Adama and Le Combat Adama – sharing the story of Adama’s life and death, and the problem of violence by the French police more generally. Four of her other brothers have been in jail in various periods since Adama’s death; Assa has stated publicly that she feels her family has been under attack ever since they contested the official explanation for his death.

29 In the years since her brother’s death, Assa has received worldwide attention and been on the forefront of the movement against police violence and brutality – both in France and worldwide. In one of our conversations in 2017, she told me that she sees this as a movement against all “forgotten populations” in France who know the police only as an “invading force.” Assa regularly gives talks about this issue and her brother’s death not just in France, but also all over the world and has received various support from various celebrities, including French rapper Mokobé and activist and scholar Angela Davis. As quoted in Le Monde, scholar Maboula Soumahoro said of Assa’s appeal, “For men, she represents their fight: she defends Black men. For women, she is a model: a French woman whom other women can identify with.”10 Relatedly, when I interviewed journalist Elsa Vigoureux, who co-wrote Lettre à Adama with Assa in 2017, she explained that Assa “is a woman who speaks for all, not just people in her condition.”

30 Assa has only received more attention, including international media coverage, since the 2020 death of George Floyd. Her cause has been seen as a symbol of what might be conceived of as France’s BLM (indeed, one U.S. news outlet referred to Adama’s death as “France’s Ferguson”)11. In June 2020, she led a demonstration against police violence of more than 20,000 protestors outside of the Tribunal judiciaire de Paris. The coincidental timing of this demonstration (only a week after Floyd’s death) meant that his death was also invoked, as the last words of both Adama and Floyd were “I Can’t Breathe”. Assa said that when she first heard of Floyd’s death, she immediately thought of her brother’s death12. In a later interview with Antidote, she explained, “When George Floyd died, that’s our brother. They died the same way. I recognize myself in Black Lives Matter, we are all Black Lives Matter. Our common issue is racial discrimination. Here as over there, it is the Blacks, the non-whites, who are being killed”13.

31 Another Black women activist who makes connections between Black Lives Matter and activism against police violence in France is Ramata Dieng. She also became an activist following the death of her brother, whom she practically raised growing up as their parents worked multiple jobs. Lamine Dieng, a 25-year-old of Senegalese origin, died after a struggle with multiple police officers in the 20th arrondissment on 17 June 200714. He was subjected to a plaquage ventral (belly tackle) and died in the ensuing struggle; he had ceased to breathe by the time he was transported by van to the police station. In the more than 10 years since his death, Ramata and her family have fought for a full investigation, and punishment for the officers involved. Ramata and some friends and family members formed a collectif, Vies Volées, as a way to mobilize others against police violence.15 They hold a march throughout the 20th arrondissment each year on June 17 demanding justice. She told me she envisions this collectif becoming a global network against police violence (Beaman and Brown 2019).
I first met Ramata in 2017 around the time of the 10th anniversary of Lamine’s death, in the context of my ongoing ethnographic work. She asked me about incidents of police killings of Black men in the U.S. and whether or not any police officers have ever been punished for this violence (at the time the answer to that question was no). It was clear that she paid attention to incidents of police violence, such as the death of Michael Brown in 2014, Freddie Gray in 2015, or Philandro Castile in 2016. At one point during our discussion, Ramata mentioned that “not until the New York Times covered Adama or Théo [Luhaka] did the French media even care [about police violence, etc].”

The 10th anniversary demonstration was much larger than in previous years (or years since). The crowd was not just Black and Arab, but rather ethnically mixed. That morning we watched a documentary, Dire à Lamine, created by another collectif (Cases Rebelles) that included footage of Lamine’s friends and relatives discussing who Lamine was, his life and the circumstances of his death, and the miscarriage of justice. Speaking solemnly into the camera in the documentary, Ramata said before bursting into tears, “The police kill us, they don’t police us. We’ve been fighting this for 10 years. We need to know what the truth is.”

Ramata is a kind and generous woman of deep convictions. She is tall and thin, and was wearing a white t-shirt with an outline of Lamine’s face and dark jeans. She is very approachable and never relents on this cause. At the press conference immediately before the demonstration, she clarified that rather than being punished, the officers involved have since been promoted. One young black woman then asked what her spirit was like these days, after fighting this for ten years. “More determined than ever,” Ramata replied.

Ramata, Assa, and other activists led us yelling into microphones as we marched for over three hours in the surrounding neighborhood. Immediately behind them was a giant banner for Vies Volées with outlines of the faces of Lamine and other victims of police violence and the slogan, “Vérité et justice pour toutes les victimes de crimes policiers.” We shouted chants including “Justice pour Lamine” and “Police assassine, justice acquitte,” while holding banners and signs that read “Qui nous protège de la police?” and “Police partout, justice nulle part.” Throughout this demonstration we stopped so that Ramata and family members of other victims could give their testimonials about their loved ones’ deaths.

At one point during this demonstration, Ramata announced “No victim of police violence has ever gotten justice. Problem comes from the state, the state is racist, the police are an arm of the state, [this] serves to enslave Blacks again. Racism continues even though we’re no longer enslaving, colonizing people … If we do not continue this fight, it will continue happening. This is menacing youth today.”

It is telling that as men are predominately victims of police violence, women are leading much of the mobilization against police violence. Therefore, in their activism, both Assa and Ramata – as well as other anti-racist activist women – are recognizing how surveillance and brutality by the police affect their families and communities. Anthropologist Christian Smith’s (2016) notion of “sequelae” references how police violence lingers beyond specific incidents of killings, particularly for Black women. So demonstrations like the ones for Adama or Lamine are not just for these specific victims, but also address the broader problem of how the police interact with and target ethno-racial minority populations. In this way, it is useful to frame police violence, and activism against it, as both racial and gendered in nature. When Assa,
Ramata, and others are fighting for justice for their male relatives, they are doing so as 
women and on behalf of Black men – in both France and globally. Moreover, part of the 
activism is identifying the quotidian nature of this violence. The deaths of Lamine or 
Adama are mere examples of a broader structural problem. So we see their activism as 
relevant both to the circulation or translation of BLM outside of the U.S., and of Black 
feminism outside of the U.S. To be clear, I am not suggesting that Black feminist 
activists – and anti-racist activists more broadly – in France are not 
critical or strategic in their reading of BLM in the U.S, but rather that how they relate 
to it is part of a long tradition of ideas about blackness and liberation circulating 
globally.

Conceptualizing Assa, Ramata, and other Black women activists as both French and 
Black makes it clear why a movement affirming Black humanity would be in 
conversation with their own ideas about blackness and systemic racism. Moreover, I am 
also not suggesting that the totality of Black feminism and Black feminist activism in 
France is subsumed in the movement against police violence. Indeed, Black feminism in 
France encompasses broader claims for full acknowledgment and inclusion of Black 
women both historically and presently in France. One recent example is Noire n’est pas 
mon métier, a 2018 publication detailing the discrimination and racism that Black 
women artists in France continually experience, as well as the problematic 
representations of Black women in French media.

Discussion : what does it mean to center Black women in our analysis of racism ?

Aya, a young Black woman who works for an anti-racist collectif in the département of 
Seine-Saint-Denis, told me, “We feel it when things happen in the United States.” She 
was referring both to incidents of police violence, and protests against those incidents. 
She is not privileging what happens in the U.S. over what happens in France, but rather 
intentionally drawing a connection between the two.

Throughout this article, I have suggested that a Black feminist reading, or one 
explicitly centering Black women, helps illustrate the ways that BLM resonates with, 
and maps onto, existing and ongoing anti-racist struggles in France. As BLM is 
commonly understood as a movement led by Black (queer) women, it is no accident 
that Black women elsewhere, who face similar and differing structural constraints and 
marginalization, would forge connections with this social movement. A focus on the 
standpoint of Black women reveals how anti-racist mobilization in France is both 
historically and presently a Black feminist movement. Gender is just as present as, and 
is inextricably intertwined with, racial identity, and both of these shape the 
possibilities of and motivations for mobilization (Beaman and Brown 2019). Anti-racist 
struggles in France have historically been Black feminist movements, as Black French 
women have challenged the racial and gender status quo from their standpoint as Black 
women. This is also true in this present moment in the struggle against police violence 
towards ethno-racial minorities.

Moreover, police violence – and mobilization against it – is one of way understanding 
the plight of Black populations, in both the U.S. and France, as well as globally. We 
should therefore look not just to how BLM is understood, interpreted or translated in
France, but also to how anti-racist struggles elsewhere, including in the U.S., have been influenced by French anti-racist activists and intellectuals, including the Nardal sisters, Frantz Fanon, or the MWASI collectif. We should also attend to how anti-racist struggle travels in multiple directions. In other words, in order for Black lives to truly matter – in France and the U.S. – we need to listen to Black women.

BIBLIOGRAPHY


NOTES


3. To be clear, I am not at all suggesting that women are not direct victims of police violence, but rather thinking through women’s positions as activists against police violence.

4. These *collectifs* include Le comité vérité et justice pour Adama, Ferguson in Paris, Brigade Anti Négrophobie, and Vies Volées.
5. The quotations I use throughout this article are therefore from transcripts of these interviews and fieldnotes of ethnographic observations.


7. Specifically, Joseph-Gabriel (2020) invites us to reconsider what our genealogy and history of decolonialization might look if we centered Black women, as opposed to rendering them in supporting roles.


14. It is important to acknowledge the spatial dimensions both of police violence itself and of protests and demonstrations against that violence, as in occurring not just in the suburbs, but also within the city, including in particular neighborhoods known for their predominance of immigrant-origin individuals, where there is a heavy presence of police officers (Body-Gendrot and Wenden 2014; Kleinman 2019).

15. https://www.viesvolees.org/

16. Théo Luhaka is another victim of brutality by the police. In February 2017, two police officers sexually assaulted him in Aulnay-sous-Bois. He was hospitalized and now has a permanent disability as a result of the attack.

17. At least prior to the George Floyd’s death in 2020, most BLM and police violence-related demonstrations were predominately Black, so this is a contrast to the make-up of French demonstrations.
18. *Cases Rebelles* is a pan-African *collectif* in France which through podcasts, books, films, and other activities fight repression in France and worldwide (http://www.cases-rebelles.org).


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**ABSTRACTS**

On the basis of about three years of ethnographic research, including interviews with activists, I discuss the role of black feminist activism and transnational solidarity in the movement against police violence, and the resonance of Black Lives Matter in France. I focus on how men of Black and Maghrebin origin are predominately killed at the hands of police, and how women of Black and Maghrebin origin women, including Assa Traoré and Ramata Dieng, are leading this burgeoning movement. This current movement of Black feminist activism is in conversation with earlier periods of Black feminist activism in France as well as with the Black Lives Matter movement in the United States. Black women activists navigate how to respond to police violence that disproportionately targets particular ethno-racial populations in a context that does not acknowledge the relationship between police violence and racism. They do so by locating the specificity of their identities as both Black and women. Black women’s activism is not only motivated by their particular positionality, but it is also shaped by it. Their unique standpoint (Collins 1986) as Black women, sisters, mothers and daughters also characterizes the transnational solidarity these women activists share with Black Feminist activists around the world. I argue that such a Black Feminist perspective is essential to understand racism in postcolonial France. In Part 1, I introduce the specific context of Black Lives Matter and police violence in France and the United States, including the deaths of Adama Traoré and George Floyd and the need for a Black Feminist interpretative reading of this context. In Part 2, I discuss Black feminist ethnography and the methods for this study, including my positionality as a Black American woman. I further articulate how the French Republican context silences discussions of race and racism, and relegates these concepts as “imports” from the United States. In Part 3, I provide a background on Black feminist activism, including intersectionality and the history of Black feminism in France and the rest of Europe. In Part 4, I discuss notions of transnational blackness, and how to consider the connections between blackness in both France and the U.S., as well as connections among racialized populations in both societies. I also discuss the relevance and resonance of Black Lives Matter in France, and how Black feminism provides a way to analyze these connections. In Part 5, I provide examples from my ethnographic research and interviews of Black women activists mobilizing against police violence. In the conclusion, I consider what it means to center Black women in our analysis of racism, not just in the United States, but also in France.

Basée sur environ trois années de recherches ethnographiques et d’entretiens avec des militantes, cet article examine le rôle de l’activisme féministe noire et la solidarité transnationale...

Basado en aproximadamente tres años de investigación etnográfica y entrevistas con militantes, este artículo examina el rol del activismo feminista negro y la solidaridad transnacional en el movimiento contra las violencias policiales, así como también la resonancia en Francia de Black Lives Matter. Dos elementos son centrales en esta investigación. Por un lado, me concentro en el hecho de que la mayoría de las personas asesinadas por la policía son hombres negros y de origen magrebí; por otro lado, en la manera en que las mujeres negras y de origen magrebí, especialmente, Assa Traoré y Ramata Dieng, conducen este movimiento en gestación. El desarrollo actual del activismo feminista dialoga constantemente tanto con periodos más antiguos del activismo feminino negro en Francia, como con el movimiento Black Lives Matter en Estados Unidos. Las militantes negras reflexionan sobre la manera en que conviene encarar la violencia policial, dirigida de manera desproporcionada a ciertas poblaciones étnico-raciales, y en un contexto donde la relación entre esta violencia y el racismo no está reconocida. Lo hacen ubicando la especificidad de su identidad en el hecho de ser mujeres y negras. Sin embargo, el activismo de las mujeres negras no está solamente motivado por su posición particular: está determinado por esta. Su punto de vista único (Collins 1986) en tanto mujeres negras, hermanas, madres e hijas también es característico de la solidaridad transnacional que vincula estas mujeres
activistas con las activistas feministas negras alrededor del mundo. Sostengo que esta perspectiva es esencial para comprender el racismo en la Francia postcolonial. La primera parte del artículo presenta el contexto específico de Black Lives Matter y de la violencia policial en Francia y en Estados Unidos, especialmente tras la muerte de Adama Traoré y de George Floyd, contexto que requiere una interpretación feminista negra. En la segunda parte, examino la etnografía feminista negra y los métodos adoptados en este estudio, especialmente mi posicionamiento en tanto estadounidense negra. Analizo luego cómo el contexto republicano francés reduce al silencio los debates sobre la raza y el racismo, descartando estos conceptos en tanto meras “importaciones” de los Estados Unidos. En la tercera parte, expongo el trasfondo del activismo feminista negro, incluyendo la interseccionalidad y la historia del feminismo negro en Francia y el resto de Europa. La cuarta parte analiza las nociones que abordan el hecho de ser negro a escala transnacional (transnational blackness) y cómo abordar los vínculos entre las poblaciones racializadas en ambas sociedades. Se trata de medir la pertinencia y las resonancias de Black Lives Matter en Francia, y la manera en que el feminismo negro permite estudiar todas estas relaciones. En la quinta parte, daré ejemplos tomados de mis investigaciones etnográficas y de mis entrevistas con activistas negras movilizadas contra la violencia policial. En conclusión, reflexiono sobre el hecho de ubicar a las mujeres negras al centro de este análisis del racismo y su significado, no sólo en los Estados Unidos, sino también en Francia.

Este artículo, asentado en tres años de investigaciones etnográficas y de entrevistas con militantes, considera el papel del activismo feminista negro y a la solidaridad transnacional en el movimiento contra las violencias policiales, así como a la resonancia del Black Lives Matter en Francia. Los elementos están en el centro de la investigación. Por un lado, concentré-me no fato de a maioria das pessoas matadas pela policía serem homens de origem negra e magrebína ; por outro lado, na maneira como as mulheres de origem negra e magrebína, nomeadamente Assa Traoré e Ramata Dieng, conduziram este movimento nascente. O desenvolvimento atual do ativismo negro está em constante diálogo com os períodos mais antigos de ativismo feminista negro em França, mas também com o movimento Black Lives Matter nos Estados Unidos. As militantes negras questionam o comportamento adequado para responder à violência policial, dirigida de maneira desproporcionada contra algumas populações étnico-raciais, e isto num contexto em que a relação entre essa violência e o racismo não é reconhecida. Elas fazem-no colocando a especificidade de sua identidade no fato de serem mulheres e negras. No entanto, o ativismo das mulheres negras não é somente motivado por sua posição particular : é determinado por esta. O seu ponto de vista único (Collins 1986) como mulheres negras, irmãs, mães e filhas é também característico da solidariedade transnacional que liga estas mulheres militantes com as ativistas feministas negras em todo o mundo. Afirme que esta perspectiva é essencial para entendermos o racismo na França pós-colonial. A primeira parte do artigo apresenta o contexto específico do Black Lives Matter e da violência policial en Francia e nos Estados Unidos, nomeadamente com a morte de Adama Traoré e de George Floyd, contexto que requer uma interpretação feminista negra. En la segunda parte, examino a etnografia feminista negra y los métodos adoptados en este estudio, nomeadamente el meu posicionamiento enquanto Americana negra. Analiso a seguir como o contexto republicano francês silencia os debates sobre a raça e o racismo, afastando esses conceitos por serem « importações » dos Estados Unidos. Na terceira parte, apresento o pano de fundo do ativismo feminista negro, incluindo a interseccionalidade e a história do feminismo negro em França e no resto da Europa. A quarta parte analisa as noções abordando o fato de ser negro em escala transnacional (transnational blackness) e como se pode abordar as relações entre estas noções en França e nos Estados Unidos, assim como as conexões entre as populações racializadas nessas duas sociedades. Trata-se igualmente de avaliar a pertinência e as resonâncias de Black Lives Matter en Francia, e a maneira como o feminismo negro permite estudar todas essas relações. Na quinta parte, darei alguns exemplos tirados das minhas
investigações etnográficas e das minhas entrevistas com ativistas negras mobilizadas contra a violência policial. Na conclusão, considero o fato de colocar as mulheres negras no centro desta análise do racismo e o seu significado, não só nos Estados Unidos mas também em França.

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Mots-clés: Violence policière, féminisme noir, Black Lives Matter, transnational blackness, ethnographie

Keywords: Police violence, Black feminism, Black Lives Matter, transnational blackness, ethnography

Palabras claves: Violencia policial, feminismo negro, Black Lives Matter, transnational blackness, etnografía


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