Towards a European Strategy to Combat Afrophobia
By Jallow Momodou and Julie Pascoët

Like anti-Gypsyism, Islamophobia, anti-Semitism and other forms of racism, Afrophobia seeks to dehumanise and deny the dignity of a large group of people defined by visible characteristics of difference, in this case, their skin colour. Afrophobia is based on socially constructed ideas of 'race', implying deep historical roots that reflect the groundless belief that certain 'racial' groups are biologically and/or culturally inferior to others. This is associated with understandings of racism as a concept and correlates to historically repressive structures of colonialism, the apartheid system in South Africa and the transatlantic slave trade. Afrophobia manifests itself through acts of racial discrimination – direct, indirect and structural – and violence, including hate speech, targeting Black people. Structural discrimination is overall discrimination by result, rather than by intent that also impacts Black people. It is a profound and pervasive form of discrimination, resulting from the normalisation and legitimisation of an array of dynamics and patterns – historical, cultural, institutional and interpersonal – that routinely advantage dominant groups while producing cumulative and chronic adverse outcomes for disadvantaged groups.

The use of the term Afrophobia has generated many questions within some parts of the anti-racism movement in Europe. Some NGOs and individuals have preferred to use the term 'anti-Black racism'. Others, in particular in the Francophone context, have suggested the use of the term Negrophobia.[107]

---

107 This is problematic in some languages because of use of the offensive and derogatory n-word.

ENAR understands and recognises that using the suffix 'phobia', such as in Islamophobia or homophobia, is not ideal as it could lead people to mistake racism for an actual fear. ENAR has however preferred to focus on one term understood and defined as encapsulating the issue of racism and structural discrimination. No word is perfect but we should not underestimate the power of the definition we put under one term. Our definition of Afrophobia refers to a specific form of racism and structural discrimination targeting Black people.

It is also extremely important to understand the complexities within which racist structures operate. The wheels of racism are driven by the concentration of power and privileges that have been accumulated as a result of enslavement, colonialism and capitalist structures created by imperialists and imposed upon people of African descent for more than five hundred years. The production of knowledge of this history has always been created and controlled by those who operate the wheels of power. As a result, people of African descent have always been mere consumers of this knowledge. A fundamental part of the struggle for equality is the creation of a system for a just and equal redistribution of power and resources between the coloniser and the colonised and between the oppressor and the oppressed. The power to produce knowledge by creating a different narrative to the dominating neo-colonial narrative is imperative in the power sharing process.

The original intent for creating the term 'Afrophobia' was to create an alternative way of knowing, an alternative to the production of knowledge which left people of African descent invisible. This is why it is fundamental for people of African descent to produce their own terms to define their realities and fill them with their own content in order to encapsulate their own understandings, history and conditions. This process in itself constitutes empowerment in its true sense and is often perceived by the oppressor and people in power as a threat to their own position in the power structure. The idea of reforming a power structure that throughout history has

been based on a relationship of domination and subordination generates a deep sense of fear of losing power and of the consequences that it entails. In addition to prejudice and discrimination, the term Afrophobia attempts to encapsulate the fear of losing power to people of African descent. People in power rarely give up their power voluntarily and every attempt that is made to create a just and equal power sharing system is perceived as a threat.

People of African descent have been subjected to enslavement, colonialism and brutal dehumanisation for over five hundred years. People of African descent may have a diversity of origins and variation in geographical, historical and cultural reference points, but the experiences are undeniably similar if not the same in facing racist practices of exclusion, discrimination, denigration and stigmatisation, as well as unequal access to labour markets, education, housing, justice, the media etc.

The term Afrophobia therefore also encompasses the socio-economic and political challenges resulting from a social construct of what is perceived as the Black race, faced by all the descendants of the African victims of the transatlantic and Mediterranean sea slave trade, including the Sub-Saharan slave trade, and descendants living primarily in the diaspora of North, Central and South America and the Caribbean.

People of African descent and Black Europeans are highlighted as particularly affected by racism and racial discrimination across the European Union. While estimates of the number of people of African descent are scant, "an estimated 7,000,000 to 12,000,000 individuals of African descent currently live in and have long had a presence in Europe, forming an influential part of the African diaspora" (European Network Against Racism, 2012). 'Numbers count' is a statement we often hear especially when speaking of democratic weight and power as a means to influence a group's socio-economic conditions, but so far people of African descent are made

the most invisible visible minority on the European political agenda today. Despite a long history of racial oppression and the persistent and increasing levels of Afrophobia against this particular group in contemporary Europe, there is a strong and broad reluctance to recognise and acknowledge the existence of Afrophobia in Europe. Racism against Black people seems to be naturally implied when we think of 'racism' and yet, it often goes unspecified, unnoticed.

> Although not a unified field, post-colonial theory developed mainly from Edward Said's analysis of the way Europeans in the nineteenth century represented cultures with which they came into contact through imperial expansion. The West produced by means of representations by writers and thinkers these other cultures as an "other" to a western norm. An Other portrayed as having characteristics which described clear negative differences from the Westerner. The production of knowledge therefore consisted of stereotyping and othering. By means of a number of varying strategies, a position of superiority for the westerner vis-à-vis the orient was guaranteed. As an alternative Said instead raised the question: How can we know and respect the other? (Pauline Stoltz, 2000: 28)

The above raised question also highlights the constant reluctance to recognise and acknowledge the realities of people of African descent but also, most importantly, the lack of interest and political will to uphold and respect the dignity and rights of people of African descent. After all, they are the 'other' according to Western norms.

This is not a post-colonial perception exclusively forced upon people of African descent only but rather a representation of several other historically oppressed and colonised groups. However, the fundamental difference is that the historical realities of many of the other groups are recognised and politically acknowledged. Broad and international strategies are in place and resources made available for implementation and evaluation. It is, however, important to

emphasise that the recognition of the vulnerability of these groups was never a given political ambition but rather came as a result of the tireless efforts and relentless work of dedicated civil society organisations throughout Europe.

This is far from reality when it comes to the fight for equal rights and dignity for people of African descent and Black Europeans. There is a strong reluctance even amongst anti-racism activists and liberals to recognise the fact that people of African descent and Black Europeans have borne and still bear a disproportionate impact of racial discrimination through greater unemployment rates, physical and socio-economic insecurity, hate crimes, unequal access to justice and education and many other disadvantages.

A recent report from Sweden, which is also the first of its kind on Afrophobia in Europe, reveals that Afro-Swedes are the Swedish minority which is most exposed to hate crimes according to statistics, indicating a 24% increase since 2008. Afrophobic hate crimes are characterised by a high proportion of physical violence that often takes place in public areas, such as schools, workplaces, residential areas, shopping malls and restaurants, hence making public areas the most threatening and hostile for Swedes of African descent. The report also reveals that the marginalisation of Afro-Swedes is apparent within all sectors of Swedish society, such as education, health, housing and employment. For instance, Afro-Swedes suffer from the lowest educational payback on the labour market, and the risk of being unemployed is significantly higher among university-educated Afro-Swedes (Mångkulturellt Centrum, 2014).

Stereotypes about Africa and people of African descent that date back to colonialism are still predominant in Western cultures and in almost every single European country, and to date, still affect the daily lives of many people of African descent and Black Europeans. The particular and acute situation of people of African descent and Black Europeans as a particularly vulnerable group in Europe

highlights the importance of specifically addressing Afrophobia at the highest political level, in conjunction with the UN International Decade for People of African Descent starting in 2015.

There is an urgent need to influence decision makers and have a term recognised as describing a reality that so far remains invisible. Failure to fully recognise Afrophobia as a distinct issue from other forms of racism increases the perpetuation of a power and post-colonial structure that continues to make people of African descent the invisible 'other'. ENAR believes that wider use and recognition of the term 'Afrophobia' is an important step in the fight against this form of racism.

What ENAR Has Done so Far

In order to make a change in people of African descent's lives and advance equality in Europe, ENAR, the only pan-European network advocating for racial equality towards the European institutions, decided to make combating Afrophobia a priority, especially following the UN Year on People of African Descent in 2011. Our annual Shadow Reports on racism in Europe issued in 2011 had a specific focus on people of African descent in order to map out key challenges. Qualitative data collected in most EU Member States showed high levels of discrimination, racist violence and speech. This first collection of data from grassroots NGOs, together with data collected by the European Union Fundamental Rights Agency on 'Sub-Saharan Africans' in their EU MIDIS survey (2009) helped the anti-racism movement objectify the phenomenon, a necessary step to trigger mobilisation and political recognition.

The second step was to initiate strategic advocacy efforts to advance equality for people of African descent, including through the creation of an ENAR steering committee comprised of European Black activists in 2013. Long-term goals, annual objectives and key advocacy opportunities were identified as a result of this reinforced collaboration between Black advocacy groups across EU

Member States. The European Parliament has been the place of key events organised to raise awareness of and explain Afrophobia to policy makers and mobilise a wider coalition of civil society actors. With the strong support of one of the few Black Members of the European Parliament (2009-2014 parliamentary term) from France, Mr Jean-Jacob Bicep,[108] ENAR organised two events on the topic, including a hearing on the subject attended by more than 200 participants in February 2014.

Advocating at the European level

ENAR uses the European Union as a vehicle to increase external political pressure on Member States. Just as it is crucial to convince Member States to push the European Union to act politically, it is necessary to convince the EU institutions to increase pressure on Member States to live up to their equality obligations. The strong European legislation on racial equality demonstrates the relevance of advocating on this issue at the European level. Indeed, the EU has a strong legislative framework on race equality: the Race Equality Directive, the Employment Equality Directive and the Framework Decision on combating racism and xenophobia, which EU Member States are required to transpose and implement in their national legislation. Another illustration of the relevance of being involved at the European level is the European dimension of the phenomenon, as evidenced by several reports mentioned above. Even though there are differences related to group sizes, background and historical population flows, similar patterns arise in Europe, especially linked to the colonial history of most European countries. This European analysis of the phenomenon gives further arguments to people of African descent and their allies to call for a European response to this problem.

---

108 See also the Written Declaration on establishing a European Day in recognition of the victims of European colonisation and colonial slavery, submitted by Jean-Jacob Bicep et al on 15 April 2013. Available at: http://www.europarl.europa.eu/sides/getDoc.do?pubRef=-// EP//NONSGML+WDECL+P7-DCL-2013-0002+0+DOC+PDF+V0//EN&language=EN.

Moreover, following the European Parliamentary elections in May 2014, we have to, more than ever, strengthen our commitments towards promoting and creating equality for all regardless of background or socio-economic status. This is more important today than ever due to the continuous rise of far-right parties in many European countries and EU Member States. This development will without a doubt have an impact on the design of policies for the protection of the socio-economic, political and fundamental rights of Europe's residents and citizens.

Political Leverages

Two entry points have been identified by ENAR to set up this two-level strategy at EU and national levels. The first is the political recognition of Afrophobia, the specific form of racism that people of African descent and Black Europeans are affected by. Only if this phenomenon is acknowledged by policy makers and addressed by policies, with its specificities and complexities, will NGOs have political leverage to hold Member States accountable. The second is the implementation of legislation. As mentioned, the EU has a strong legislative framework. It offers strong political leverage as it is up to the European Commission and the Court of Justice of the EU to ensure the implementation of the law by Member States. As the recent assessment of the European Commission on the implementation of the Race Equality Directive and of the Framework Decision on combating racism and xenophobia shows, there are still significant gaps both in transposition and implementation of these directives.

Therefore ENAR, together with its members at the national level, has developed strategies to use these different leverages: alliance building with and pressure on Members of the European Parliament and high-level political representatives; shadow reporting on racism to bring forward victims' voices and qualitative/quantitative data; and increased pressure on Member States to collect comparable sets of data disaggregated by ethnicity to prove discrimination, inform policies and assess progress.

To complement this and activate both the European and national levels consistently, different approaches are put in place, such as national mappings of the situation, mobilisation and empowerment of key victimised communities (via national events for example), building of coalitions with other organisations not working primarily on anti-racism (such as women's rights NGOs, trade unions, universities, etc.), and coordinated advocacy work with decision makers.

Strategic Goals

All these efforts support ENAR's strategic goal: the **adoption of a European Union Framework for national strategies on combating Afrophobia** in all fields of life. This framework would follow the model of the EU Framework for National Roma Integration Strategies (NRIS), adopted in 2011 by EU Member States and the first EU strategy promoting the inclusion of a specific ethnic group. The need for specific policy strategies comes from the fact that despite existing non-discrimination legislation, more comprehensive and coordinated policy efforts are needed to address inequalities affecting a specific ethnic group at national level. ENAR identified four lessons learned from the Roma related advocacy for an effective strategy to combat Afrophobia. Firstly, the EU Framework for NRIS lacked an understanding of racism and racial discrimination as a root cause of exclusion. Roma have been seen more as 'social problems' than as victims of structural discrimination and racism, hence the need to recognise politically the specific form of racism and all its dynamics before having a Framework adopted. Secondly, there has been a significant lack of meaningful participation of Roma in the design and implementation of the resulting NRIS policies, demonstrating that Roma were considered more as service recipients than as agents of change. Thirdly, in the Framework for NRIS, while data collection was mentioned as instrumental to measuring progress, there was no systematic and binding requirement of equality data collection disaggregated by ethnicity. In most cases, it was left to the discretion of the Member States. Finally,

there was limited focus on policies addressing issues of multiple discrimination for Roma women, LGBT, children, elderly persons or with disabilities.

An EU framework for national strategies on combating Afrophobia should therefore include the following elements in order to be effective: a **recognition of this specific form of racism** and the need to raise public awareness about it; the **participation of people of African descent and Black Europeans** in the design, implementation and evaluation of the strategies; a requirement to **collect disaggregated equality data** on the target groups in order to measure progress made; and the inclusion of **policies addressing structural and multiple discrimination**. The national strategies should address discrimination in all fields of life, including employment, education, policing, access to justice, housing, health and access to good and services.

Member States should also make efforts to recognise the legacy of their colonial past, for instance by considering establishing truth commissions, producing history factsheets and educational material on colonialism and the transatlantic slave trade, and exploring national reparation schemes. School curricula must make reference to the presence of people of African descent and their contribution to European economy, culture and society. Particular attention should be paid to removing negative and stereotypical portrayals of Black people in educational material, traditional/cultural representations and the media. The UN Decade for People of African Descent (2015-2025) should provide the necessary impetus for Member States to act.

References
European Network Against Racism. 2012. *Black Europeans and People of African Descent in Europe*. Factsheet. Available at: http://www.enar-eu.org/IMG/pdf/fs_people_of_african_descent_final.pdf.

European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights. 2009. *EU-MIDIS. European Union Minorities and Discrimination Survey*.

Mångkulturellt Centrum. 2014. *Afrofobi: En Kunskapsöversikt* över *Afrosvenskars Situation i Dagens Sverige*. Tumba (Sweden): Mångkulturellt Centrum.

Stoltz, Pauline. 2000. 'About Being (T)here and Making a Difference – Black Women and the Paradox of Visibility'. *Lund Political Studies*, 115.