RIVERS IN RESISTANCE

A HANDBOOK FOR QTIBIPOC IN THE NORDICS

About Rivers in Resistance

Rivers in Resistance was initiated by a group of QTIBIPOC activists and organisers working in different organisations across Denmark, Sweden, Finland and Norway. The project is a collaboration between Normstormerne (DK), LGBT Asylum (DK), Tamam (SE), Salam (NO) and Helsinki Pride Community (FI) and is funded by NIKK (Nordic Information on Gender). Our expertise is broad and lays within youth work, critical pedagogy, asylum- and refugee experiences, Muslim queer experiences, antiracist pedagogy, grassroots organising, and leadership development.

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@rivers_in_resistance

TO THOSE THAT CAME BEFORE US, TO THOSE WE LOST TOO SOON AND TO THOSE YET TO COME.

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ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

This handbook is informed by the invaluable knowledge and experiences shared by the QTIBIPoC who participated in our research. We are thankful for your time and for all that you have shared.

Our gratitude to the people we are in community with, the handbook also speaks from the shared experience of organising and all we have learned and co-created together.

We do not speak as an island; we have approached this work with intentionality around citation, striving to honour the contributions and voices of all those who have informed this handbook. This work is situated in a tradition of decolonial and feminist thinking and practice.

We extend a heartfelt thanks to each other for the collaboration on this project. Despite various challenges, our collective effort has birthed this work.

Special thanks to Gogo for translating, Abdul for the design and illustrations, and Siggalycke for hosting us during a retreat. We are also deeply grateful to Janna for her support and enormous contributions.

To everyone who has been a part of this journey, your efforts and support have been invaluable.

Thank you.

ABOUT THIS HANDBOOK

We are excited to present to you the first Rivers in Resistance handbook. This project came about as different QTIBIPOC organisers within NGO's agreed on the importance of gathering knowledge on QTIBIPoC experiences, movements, resilience, and resistances in the Nordic region. Perspectives on QTIBIPoC experiences often come from non-Nordic contexts like the UK and the US. We wanted to address this gap by providing context and tools rooted in the Nordic environment, encompassing Denmark, Iceland, Sápmi, Faroe Islands, Åland, Sweden, Norway, Finland, and Kalaallit Nunaat.

The handbook is based on research we carried out at the end of 2023 that included a survey, in-depth interviews, and workshop sessions. Our goal has been to synthesise and transform the research into practical tools and resources that will be useful for QTIBIPoC and their communities. Both in the process of doing the research and in how we hope this handbook will be used, we have prioritised creating communicative spaces where QTIBIPoC can share and understand each other's experiences and analyses.

"How can we navigate oppressive environments with core practices that build community, resistance, and more loving ways of living?"

Alexis Pauline Gumbs

This question from Black queer feminist Alexis Pauline Gumbs is an opening to considering which core practices we need to build and nurture. We hope you will create your own answers to this question as you work through this handbook.

WHAT IS QUEER, TRANS, INTERSEX, BLACK, INDIGENOUS, AND PEOPLE OF COLOUR?

The term **"QTIBIPoC"** refers to individuals who are queer, trans, intersex, and are either Black, Indigenous, or a Person of Color (BIPoC). This definition encompasses those who are descended from anywhere in Africa, Asia, Sápmi territories, Inuit territories, the Indigenous peoples of Australia, the Americas, the Caribbean, Indian Pacific, and Roma, Sinti (and) Travellers. This includes transnational adoptees from the above-mentioned regions as well as people of mixed ancestry and origin. The definition that we use builds on the definition created by the Cutie.BPOC Festival that took place for the first time in Berlin in 2015, which was the first time many of us who birthed this project were in a big community space by and for QTIBIPoC.

The concept evolved from earlier social justice movements focused on racial justice, LGBTQ+ rights, and the intersections of these identities. For instance, the Stonewall Riots in New York City, led by figures such as Marsha P. Johnson and Sylvia Rivera highlighted the role of racialised trans women in the fight for LGBTQ+ rights. Activists and scholars in the 1970s and 1980s began to explore the intersections of race, sexuality, and gender, leading to a more nuanced understanding of identity. For example, the Combahee River

Collective, a Black feminist lesbian organisation, highlighted the interlocking systems of oppression faced by Black women, including racism, sexism, and homophobia.

More than an acronym, **"QTIBIPoC"** has been used as a framework to create spaces and communities that specifically address the needs and experiences of people at these intersections. It is an approach to social justice that acknowledges people's lived experiences, not just their intellectual contribution to the cause.

We acknowledge that the term QTIBIPoC originates from outside the Nordic region and may not resonate with everyone. We use it here as a working definition to think about and discuss the intersection of being Queer, Trans, and/or Intersex as well as racialised in different ways.

RACIALISATION

Racialisation is a concept that describes how individuals and groups of people are ascribed different meanings depending on race, ethnicity, appearance, and cultural markers. In the Nordic context, it is often used to challenge the conception that racism is based on a person's race and rather see how racism happens through a process of being perceived as e.g. aggressive, loud, victimised, angry, different, dangerous, untrustworthy, lazy, exotic, submissive, sexualised etc. In this way, racialisation is used to shift focus from a person's racial/ethnic identity onto the process of seeing or treating someone through racist lenses.

WHAT IS A TOOL ?

In the context of a handbook, a "tool" is any resource, method, or piece of information that helps the user achieve specific goals, develop their thinking, or complete a task. Tools are designed to facilitate learning, problem-solving, or implementing a strategy. The tools shared in this handbook are a combination of guides, reflection questions, case studies, and examples, as well as a glossary and a resource section.

WHO IS THIS FOR ?

This handbook is for QTIBIPoC to find tools, resources, and knowledge from a Nordic perspective. It can be used individually or as a support in building QTIBIPoC communities and movements. It is also useful for QTIBIPoC working within different organisations, for organisations that serve QTIBIPoC, as well as any others who want to understand the experiences of QTIBIPoC individuals and communties.

WHO WE ARE

Rivers in Resistance is a collaborative project that was birthed out of old, new and yet to become friendships and co-organising histories. Because not all of our workplaces were QTIBIPoC-led or centred, we wanted the project to have some autonomy and embody a By Us For Us principle.

Yasmin Yusuf (she/her) is a somalian-born human rights activist from Finland and has worked with migration related themes in the field of social work for more than a decade. For the last four years she has been leading Helsinki Pride Community's Together with Pride that offers professional individual support, counseling and peer support groups and advocates for the rights of LGBTQIA+ asylum seekers and people with refugee backgrounds.

Michel Candelaria (she/her) is a human rights activist, fighting for LGBTQI+ rights, specially focused on racialised trans people and is participating in the project as a representative of LGBT Asylum, where she is a member of the board. She is an Afro-Colombian trans woman that lives in Denmark as a refugee with temporary residence. She brings with her the experience of black and racialised queer and trans asylum seekers and refugees in Denmark. Michel is also a performance artist in the group "Las Dramáticas" in Copenhagen.

Violeta Ligrayen Yañez (she/her) is a longtime activist and organizer raised in Sweden and based in Copenhagen. Her work centers grassroots leadership and movement building, currently in a local harm reduction organization advocating for migrant sex workers rights. Within the project, she initially represented Normstormerne before leaving her position in December 2023, and continued within the project doing management and editorial work.

Mac Velasquez (he/him) is an activist who has been working with lgbtqia+ rights, antiracism, and intersectional feminist perspectives for the past 20 years. He is currently working as the project leader of Tamam Luna, and is a part of Försoning och konflikt, a Transformative Justice group in Malmö.

Deria Rumina Yenidogan (she/her/they/them) is a lawyer, musician, DJ and activist based in Malmö, Sweden. She has mainly been working with asylum rights, and researching and educating about racism towards youth in Swedish civil society. They also work with building bigger diversity in Malmö's culture and nightlife scene by organizing events and teaching DJing. Deria initially was a part of the project as a representative of Tamam, but left their position in June 2023. Since then she has continued within the project as a community consultant.

We therefore created a Core group that facilitated and led the project collectively. We hired a Research Consultant, Janna, who has developed and led the research and handbook production. Normstormerne hosted the project and initially held project management responsibilities, although this has become a more collective task throughout the project.

Qwin Werle (they/them) is a Copenhagen based organiser, writer and NADA practitioner, born and raised in Kenya. Throughout the past decade, they have been involved in qtibipoc, housing justice, and migration and asylum organising. Within the project, they initially represented LGBT Asylum before leaving their position in October 2023, and continued within the project as a community consultant, co-producing and co-developing the content of the handbook with Janna.

Janna Aldaraji (she/her) is a researcher, organiser, and writer whose practice is shaped by developing spaces for co-learning & communing; through facilitation, teaching, and collaborative research processes. She co-founded Venom Zine Library, a platform for DIY self-publishing and Rendering the State, a critical research collective.

Abdul Dube (he/they) Born in 'ǁHui !Gais' indigenous Khoe language meaning "where clouds gather." Now known only as "(Cape Town)" South Africa. A multidisciplinary artist, designer, curator and workshop facilitator based in Aarhus, Denmark. His work concerns questions of multicultural belonging, racism and resistance, intersectional solidarity, heritage, sustainability, Black imagination and activism. Print maker, zinesters and graphic designer .

Samaria Mata Alvarez (she/her) is a Venezuelan behavioural scientist/psychologist and political scientist. She has been involved in different grassroots communities and civil society working with culture, social justice, education, diversity, antiracism and LGBTQ+ rights in Venezuela, China and Sweden. She's currently based in Sweden, working as a youth leader at Tamam Luna.

Begard Reza (she/her) is the General Secretary of Salam, an organization for queer and trans people with a Muslim background in Norway. Currently based in Oslo, she was born in South Kurdistan. Begard is an activist deeply involved in radical grassroots communities, working with Anti-colonial, Queer and Socialist issues.
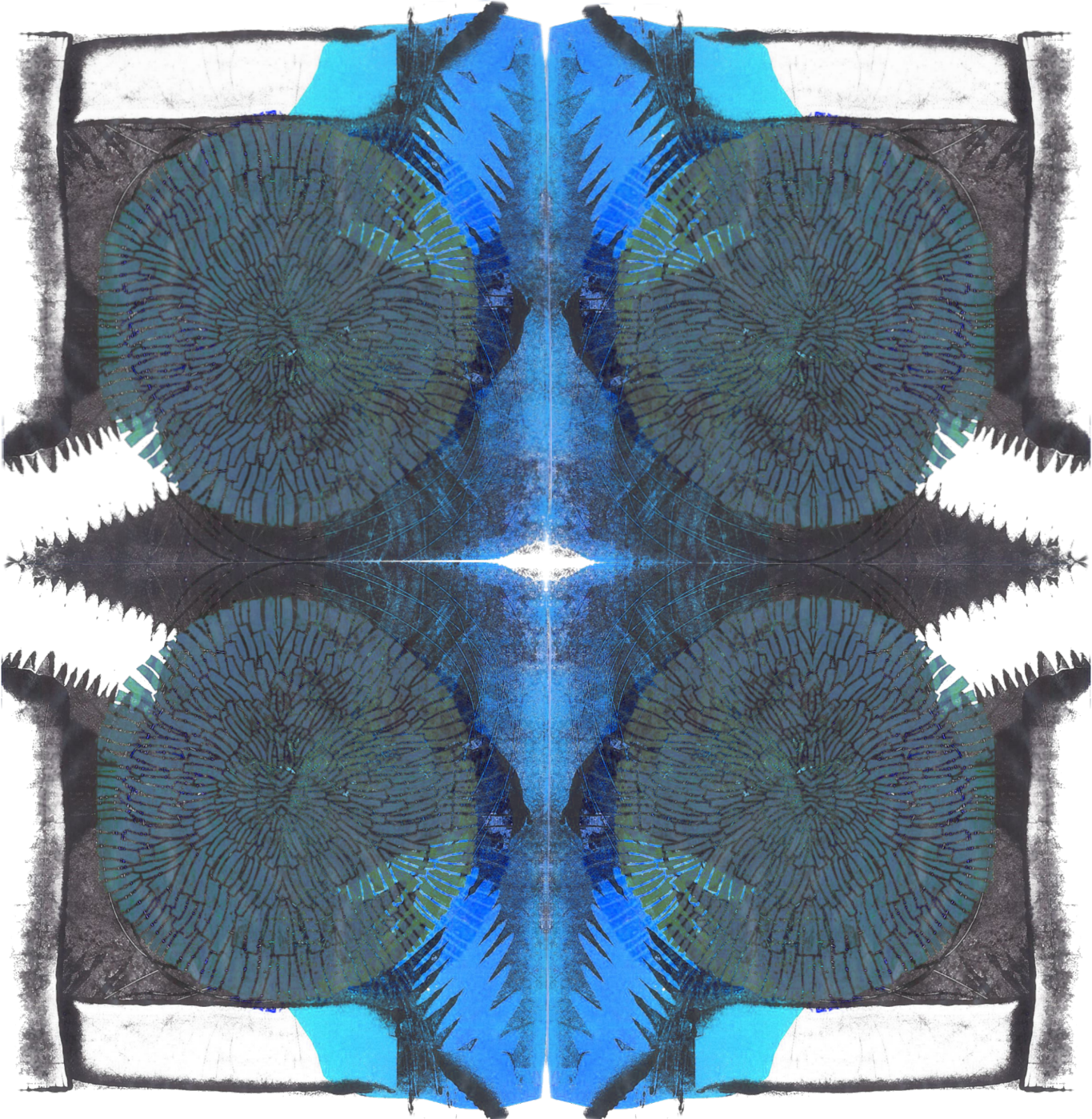
HOW TO USE THIS HANDBOOK

The handbook is organised in **three different sections**:

Section 1: **On Intersections** will unpack the complexities within the umbrella term QTIBIPoC. The section will help you think about power, privilege, and building solidarity with some reflection questions, and offers an affinity group-building tool as a resource for exploring positionality and raising awareness.

Section 2: **Community & Organising** shares some insights from our research on sustaining community, reflects on the assumptions, fears, and expectations we all bring with us to community spaces, and provides you with a tool for creating community agreements.

Section 3: **Potentials and Tensions Working in NGOs** provides insights on the benefits and challenges of working in NGOs that serve QTIBIPoC as members of this community. You'll also find prompts to help you reflect on your experiences and develop strategies to navigate the complex dynamics of NGOs, along with some advice and practical tips to support you working within this field.

Glossary & Resources: If there's an unfamiliar term or concept, have a look at the glossary for a definition. The resources section includes further readings, films, tools, and information to expand on the topics we have covered.

There's no specific way to read or use this handbook; you can jump directly to the section that interests you or go through it chronologically. There are blank pages for you along the way to take notes and doodle.

Attribution: Alexis Pauline Gumbs, Undrowned: Black Feminist Lessons from Marine Mammals.

SITUATING QTIBIPOC WITHIN THE NORDIC CONTEXT

The Nordic region is often praised for its progressive social policies and inclusive societies. However, the reality for racialised individuals, including QTIBIPOCs, paints a different picture. In this chapter, we will explore the Nordic context and unpack key terms such as Colonial Amnesia, Nordic Exceptionalism, and Colorblindness as building blocks to start understanding the lived experiences of QTIBIPoC in this region.

Colonial Amnesia & Nordic Exceptionalism

Within the Nordic region, there is a long tradition of silencing and downplaying its involvement in colonialism and the transatlantic slave trade, to a mere bystanders role. But all Nordic countries had a hand in these practices and have benefited from them. Scholars and activists working in the region have termed this collective forgetfulness and selective memory Colonial Amnesia. The term refers to how Nordic colonial history is forgotten through the repetition of national narratives and media messages. Through time, these narratives have created a regional sense of moral superiority and contributed to a self-narrative of being "exceptional" in comparison to other Western nations that participated in slavery and colonialism. Nordic exceptionalism refers to this self-perceived bystander status and describes how, through this forgetfulness, the region is able to understand and brand itself as a forerunner in matters of gender equality, human rights, democracy, and anti-racism. However, this image of Nordic Exceptionalism overlooks and erases a crucial aspect: the ongoing impact of colonialism and the increasing intolerance and discrimination towards migrants, refugees, and other racialised groups. Despite anti-racist movements and media discussions shedding light on racism, discrimination, and the ongoing legacies of colonialism in the region, Nordic countries continue embracing Colonial Amnesia and viewing themselves as exceptional, making it difficult and nearly impossible to address and challenge racist attitudes, behaviours, and policies in the region.

How Can I Be Racist? I Don't See Colour!

In the last 20 years, the Nordic countries have become less tolerant toward racialised people while still claiming to be democratic, post-racial, and anti-racist societies. While there is increasing hostility towards racialised groups, the denial of racism remains strong. This is due to Colorblindness, another mechanism used by the dominant white population to deny and allow racial issues to be ignored. Colorblindness takes place when members of the dominant population claim "not to see" racialised signs, such as skin colour, under the false understanding that this makes them anti-racist. For instance, you might have heard a white person say, "How can I be racist? I don't see colour," in response to being confronted about their racism. In this way, colourblindness discredits those who criticise racism by portraying them as the ones introducing race into the conversation, which, according to this logic, makes them the real racist.

This creates a frustrating situation for racialised individuals, being caught between the denial of their experiences of racism and a false accusation of being racist.

Racialised and LGBTQ+ in the Nordics
Racialised LGBTQ+ individuals in the Nordics face discrimination and prejudice based on their sexual orientation and gender identity, similar to their white counterparts. However, QTIBIPoC experience additional forms of racialised oppression, such as islamophobia, xenophobia, racism, and anti-Blackness, both within the dominant white queer community and in the larger white cis-heteronormative society. For QTIBIPoC, these various forms of oppression intersect, creating unique and complex challenges. As one QTIBIPoC expressed during our research, "The issues [we face] are separate but compound together at the same time," affecting access to healthcare, housing, employment, community, and more. Additionally, within broader BIPOC communities, there can be varying degrees of acceptance and understanding of LGBTQ+ individuals. However, the stereotype of BIPOC being inherently anti-LGBTQ+ perpetuates the false idea that being BIPOC and LGBTQ+ are incompatible identities. Many QTIBIPoC feel caught between two worlds; seen as too queer by their BIPOC community and not queer enough by the white queer community. Throughout our research, QTIBIPOC expressed a recurring desire to connect with others who understand and relate to their unique experiences and challenges.

Unfortunately, meeting others like them has been challenging for QTIBIPoC living in the suburbs and countryside, far from larger cities like Copenhagen or Oslo. However, within larger Nordic cities, there is a growing movement of QTIBIPoC separatist organising and community building, offering QTIBIPoC the sense of belonging, support, and community they have longed for.

We hope it's clear why it's important to approach QTIBIPOC issues intersectionally, recognising that single-issue approaches don't adequately address the complex challenges faced by individuals at the intersection of queer, trans, intersex, Black, Indigenous, and People of Color identities.

By acknowledging the interconnectedness of racism, homophobia, transphobia, and other forms of oppression, we can better understand and address the complex experiences of QTIBIPOC. However, it's important to recognise that while the term QTIBIPoC is useful for highlighting our shared experiences and bringing us together across difference, it can also oversimplify and erase the differences in power and access that exist between us. We will explore this more in the next section.

Attribution: This chapter is indebted to the invaluable contributions of QTIBIPoC research participants and the activism, writing, teachings, and research of Marronage, Lene Myong, Oda-Kange Midtvåge Diallo, Elizabeth Löwe Hunter, Tobias Hübinette, Aka Hansen, and Jin Haritaworn.

SECTION 1

The umbrella term "QTIBIPoC" holds space for some different intersections of being racialised and Queer, Trans, or Intersex . In our plurality, we bridge many different struggles, so we can't talk about queer rights without also talking about racism, anti-Blackness, anti-immigration politics, Islamophobia and more. Fighting for QTIBIPoC rights and livable futures in an intersectional way means addressing and working against these oppressive structures, policies, and power dynamics and the ways they affect our lives.

This intersectional lens can be missing in white queer spaces, leaving us feeling alienated because our everyday realities are not reflected. Coming together with other QTIBIPoC can be exciting, especially in a Nordic context where it can feel like there are not so many of us. But uniting as QTIBIPoC is also more complex than this. Sexuality, gender identity and race are not the only things at stake within the term QTIBIPoC. For example, two Black queers living in the same city will share many experiences, but other factors like their class background, citizenship status, or if they are disabled will affect their everyday lives differently.

We should hold and embrace our differences. When we don't name these differences and work to disrupt the ways they separate us, different power dynamics can creep in and take over, and we can risk reproducing the oppressions we thought we were working against. Embracing both our commonalities and differences is hard (and sometimes messy) but we shouldn't be afraid – remember that as QTIBIPoC we hold a lot of experience and knowledge of this complexity.

In this section, we will share some of the intersections within QTIBIPoC that came up during our research. Our hope is to open up and expand on what we come to think of as QTIBIPoC in a Nordic context.

INSIGHTS

This part of the handbook will use our research material to present some of the intersections that can often be looked past or not understood. The different perspectives introduced in this section are brief introductions and won't capture the full complexity of the experiences within our community. It's surprising to learn about what people are dealing with, or have dealt with, various challenges that we may not fully understand or support. The burden of education mustn't fall solely on those who are most affected, so we invite you to use our resources section to find out more.

WHITENESS

Whiteness refers to the construction of the white race and the system of oppression that affords white people privileges and advantages through laws, policies, media, schools, corporations, institutions, juridical systems, freedom of movements, healthcare systems, etc. It is the result of social and cultural processes, rooted in a global history of European colonialism, imperialism, and transatlantic slavery, and maintained today through various institutions, ideologies, and everyday social practices.

In a Nordic context, whiteness can be used to describe a racial hierarchy that makes white people's physical features, cultural traditions and social behaviors into the norm and more desirable. This is often perceived as invisible for white people themselves, but becomes very apparent for BIPOC entering white spaces.

TRANSNATIONAL ADOPTEES

In our research, many people mentioned feeling frustrated that there wasn't enough understanding of their specific experience and how it affects the way they move in the world. This was brought up by transnational adoptees who discussed feeling overlooked in white queer and QTIBIPoC spaces or communities. A lack of knowledge on adoption justice issues can make it difficult for adoptees to feel their struggle is understood and supported by others within these spaces and communities.

"Being transracially adopted and queer also made it difficult to feel comfortable in white queer spaces. But I've also sometimes felt like I don't belong in queer BIPOC spaces, when I don't have any connection to my heritage, language and culture"

"I can't connect with other QTIBIPoC as easily, I don't have access to a family who understands the discrimination I face (in fact, they don't believe me), and the feeling of not belonging is intensified, but also lessened because a lot of people relax when they find out you didn't migrate here and your proximity to whiteness is closer than they thought"

In the research, the issue of adoption being pushed as a queer right within the mainstream LGBTQ+ movement was also brought up.

"It can also be a touchy subject to discuss because for many lgbtqia+ couples/families, adoption is one of the few ways having children is possible"

Many adoptee justice activists have criticised the reasoning described in this quote by highlighting how the transnational adoption system serves a logic of Western superiority and white saviourism. In the mainstream LGBTQ+ movement, the right to build a family through adoption comes at the expense of others – both child and first families.

Adding to this, investigations into adoption agencies across the Nordics have revealed practices of abduction, persuasion and child trafficking often sanctioned by the state.

Because of this, adoptee justice organisers across the Nordics have been campaigning to end transnational adoption. Despite all the investigative work exposing malpractice in the industry and the awareness-raising by adoptee justice activists, we, unfortunately, continue to see the mainstream LGBTQ+ movement fight for adoption as their right.

ASYLUM AND REFUGEE EXPERIENCE

If you have sought asylum your experience of being QTIBIPoC in the Nordics might be very different to others who have citizenship or a stable residence permit. There are also differences depending on:

- If you are waiting to hear back on a decision on your application.

- If you have received a residence permit and if this is temporary or permanent.

- If your asylum claim has been rejected and where you are in the appeals process.

- If you are living undocumented without any visa or permitted immigration document.

Many QTIBIPoC with asylum experience expressed feelings of isolation and described difficulties in fitting into Nordic societies. They often feel like outsiders, finding it challenging to forge friendships and romantic relationships because of misconceptions about intentions.

"Once they know you are a Black and you are an immigrant they will be thinking that you are just after them for papers, which kills the vibe."

Several also discussed that homophobia and transphobia came from other racialised people from their own or other cultural backgrounds. Often, when harassment occurs in asylum camps or reception centres, the victim rather than the perpetrator is the one relocated.

"They don't transfer the people who harassed they transfer the person who is LGBTQ."

Discussions also highlighted the racial dynamics within the asylum process, particularly regarding the treatment of displaced Ukrainian. Perceived as more European because of their whiteness, Ukrainians received preferential treatment in the camps.

"We are less wanted. You can see it when they are allocating rooms or welfare. They are given better services in the camps and even less waiting time."

Talking with people with different asylum experiences prompted us to think about the amount of time legal status can take up in people's lives. Nordic states, like many other European states, use waiting time and bureaucracy as border strategies. The people we spoke with thought the long process was intended to make them give up or to make the experience as difficult as possible so less people are granted asylum.

A question to consider with those around you is how you act in solidarity with those who have been or are currently in the asylum system. QTIBIPoC issues are interlinked with migration justice work. A practical reflection someone brought up in an interview is how accessible it is for people without a stable immigration status to be part of a community: Is there translation? Is there space for engaging in a different capacity? What everyday structures are created to support those with asylum experience?

NEURODIVERGENCE

There is a lack of awareness of neurodivergence that makes it difficult for QTIBIPoC to both access and feel considered within different communities. For instance, autism, ADHD, and dyslexia are neurodiverse conditions that affect how people process information, communicate, and engage with others. Neurodivergent people face specific challenges in different aspects of life, and their unique ways of processing information and engaging with others are frequently misunderstood or not valued. Neurodiversity is an intersectional issue that relates to other forms of oppression such as race, class, and gender. In our research, Neurodiverse QTIBIPoC discussed specific challenges in struggling to access an accurate diagnosis and support, for example because of systemic racism within healthcare. While neurodiverse people might find support and understanding in terms of race and queer issues in QTIBIPoC communities, this can be lacking with their neurodivergent experience.

"Because I'm neurodivergent and have struggles with social cues I often experience ableism within the QTIBIPoC communities and therefore I've not found any true support"

This highlights the need for more inclusive practices and a better understanding of neurodiversity within the QTBIPOC community.

Some ways we can begin to do this are:

- Learning about what neurodiversity is, and understanding the spectrum of neurological difference.

- Considering communication practices, this could include clear and straightforward language, visual aids, and multiple formats for communication (written, verbal, visual) to suit different needs.

- Quiet areas at events or workshops for those who are sensory-sensitive, clear signage, and incorporating structured breaks.

- Offering structured plans such as timetables, scheduled activities and time blocking.

- Including neurodiverse people in decision-making processes within the community.

- Implement the different feedback neurodivergent community members give on how community practices can be improved.

SOCIAL CLASS

Social class refers to a division of society based on social and economic status. A combination of factors like income, education, occupation, and wealth can determine class status. Your class and how it affects access to resources, power, and privilege depend on other dimensions of identity like race, gender, and disability. To address class we have to understand the particular circumstances someone comes from and how these factors influence their life situation today.

In the research, the ways QTIBIPoC experiences and class intertwine to affect access to resources such as healthcare, education, housing, gender-affirming care, and mental health came up. For example, specific challenges, such as securing housing, arise because of not having parents to back you financially, not having the funds for deposits, and not being perceived as a "trustworthy" tenant.
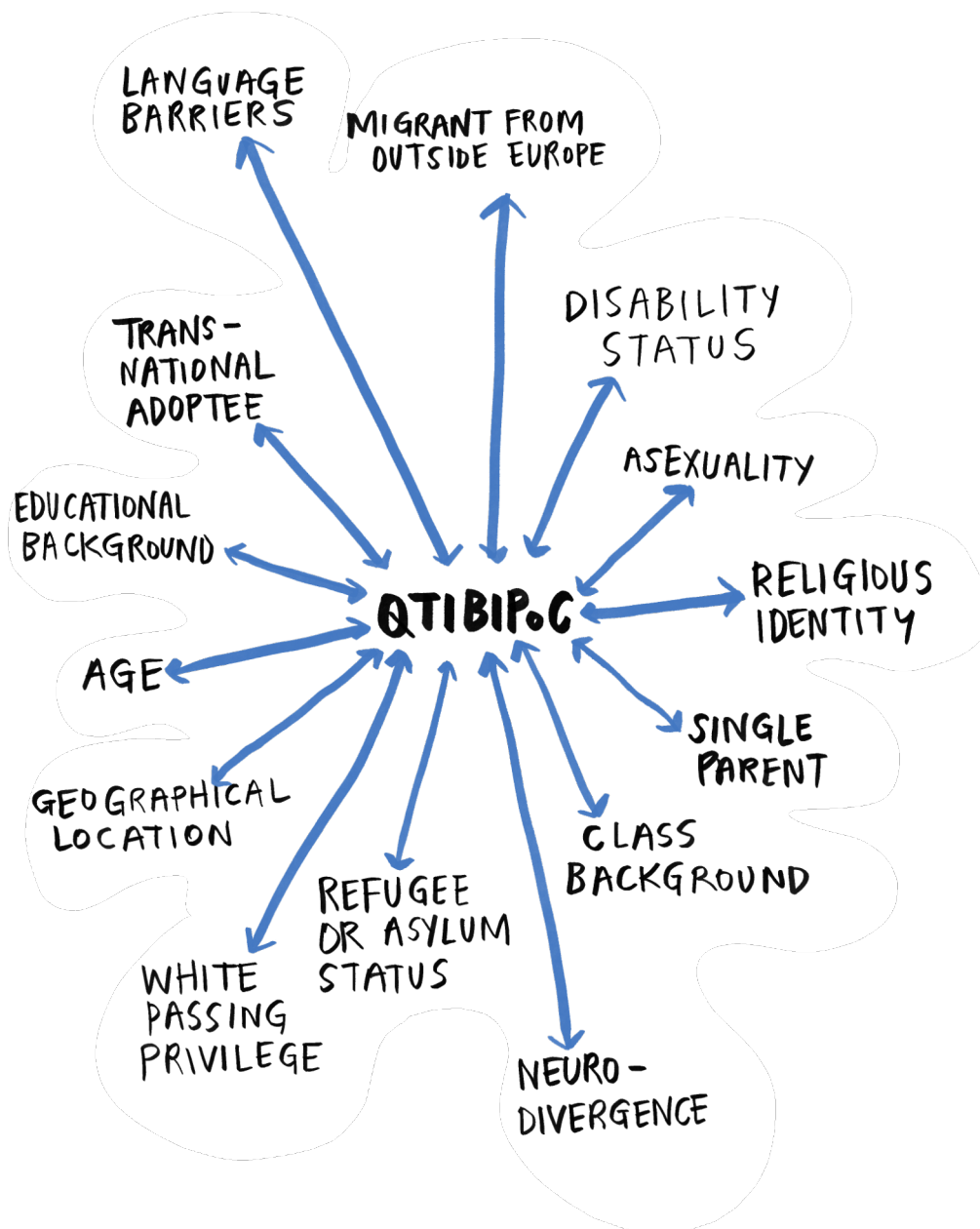
Within broader queer movements, there is often a failure to address class issues, leaving lower-income and working-class people alienated from the communities around them. An answer from the survey captured this:

"Queerness is not always a celebration to me, it comes with social class and many other intersections that I often don't feel like I'm sharing a similar experience with white-dominated queer communities in this country."
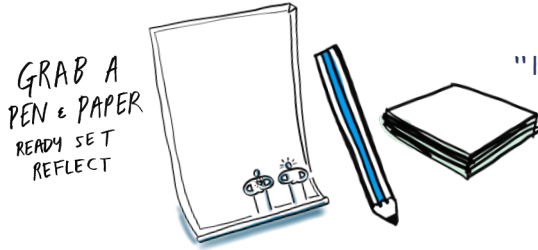
Our research found that the absence of talking directly about class also extended to different QTIBIPoC communities. Some people we spoke to identified this lack of collective class consciousness as a challenge in seeking out or being part of a QTIBIPoC community. Many of us are reflecting on and considering class, especially as working-class QTIBIPoC, but the practice of addressing this collectively and shifting the discussion away from being a personal issue is missing. It's crucial that we recognise the diverse economic realities within a community, practice talking directly about class and our private economies, practically support QTIBIPoC in accessing basic needs, and find ways to make social and political engagement more accessible to lower-income and working-class QTIBIPoC.

"BEING QTIBIPOC ALSO MEANS CONSIDERING ..."

QTIBIPOC

LANGUAGE BARRIERS

MIGRANT FROM OUTSIDE EUROPE

TRANS-NATIONAL ADOPTEE

DISABILITY STATUS

ASEXUALITY

EDUCATIONAL BACKGROUND

RELIGIOUS IDENTITY

AGE

SINGLE PARENT

GEOGRAPHICAL LOCATION

CLASS BACKGROUND

WHITE PASSING PRIVILEGE

REFUGEE OR ASYLUM STATUS

NEURO-DIVERGENCE

REFLECTION QUESTIONS

GRAB A
PEN & PAPER
READY SET
REFLECT

"It is not our differences that divide us. It is our inability to recognise, accept, and celebrate those differences."

– Audre Lorde

The following reflection questions can be used on your own, to kickstart important conversations with a friend, or in larger groups and community settings. The intention behind these questions is to make room for the ways we are different, especially in terms of our experiences with power, privilege, and access. Avoiding these discussions can lead to tensions and conflicts, preventing us from finding opportunities for solidarity with one another.

While it might feel difficult and uncomfortable to start these discussions, remember the words of Audre Lorde, a revolutionary Black lesbian poet and activist. She taught us that openly embracing and acknowledging our differences, can actually bring us closer together and foster the understanding and solidarity needed to transform our circumstances.

01 How would it make you feel if others acknowledge these differences?

02 How are you positioned within your local (QTIBIPoC) community ?

03 Is this different from how you are positioned within a larger society in the Nordics?

04 How does your positionality change in other contexts around the world ?

05 What aspects of your lived experience tend to be invisible or overlooked ?

06 How do you navigate benefiting from power structures that oppress others in your community ?

07 In what ways is it challenging to discuss power, privilege, discrimination or other forms of oppressions ?

08 How can we create spaces where these conversations feel safe and encourage openness and vulnerability in addressing our differences ?

A FEW TIPS ON HAVING DIFFICULT CONVERSATIONS

Difficult talks can bring up all sorts of uncomfortable feelings within us. So, before starting a potentially difficult talk, try doing something to calm your nervous system. For example, you could do a grounding exercise like box breathing or butterfly hugs to reconnect with your body and centre your mind.

Once you are feeling calmer, we encourage you to begin the conversation with a check-in where each participant shares their current feelings, energy levels, and intentions for the discussion.

For example: **"I'm feeling a bit nervous and tired after a full day of work, but feel ready to engage in this talk. My intention and hope is to understand your perspective and find ways to move forward together."**

LISTEN DEEPLY AND MIRROR EACH OTHER: Listen deeply to each other by fully focusing on what is being said without interruption, judgement, or thinking about what you are going to say next. Deep listening will also help you mirror what the other person said. So, before responding or sharing your own experience or perspective on the situation, reflect what you've heard to ensure understanding and validation. This helps prevent misunderstandings and will strengthen the connection between you.

For example; **"Thank you for sharing your feelings with me. I see how [situation/action/ sentence] made you sad/ hurt you/ confused you etc. . . "**
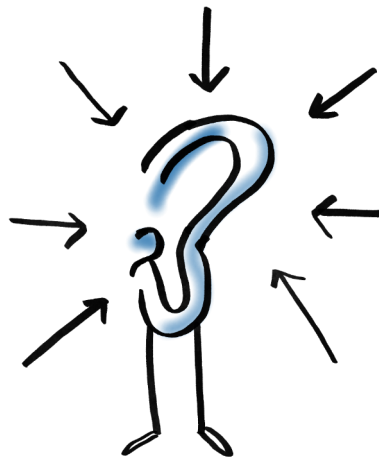
EXPECT DIFFERENCES AND AVOID DEFENSIVENESS: Remember that differences in opinions, experiences, and emotions are expected and not dangerous. So, do your best to approach the conversation with openness and a willingness to understand different perspectives. If you find yourself becoming defensive during the conversation, take a moment to instead be curious as to why you are having this reaction. Consider what you are trying to protect and why. Exploring these underlying feelings can help you better understand yourself and contribute to a more honest and generative talk.
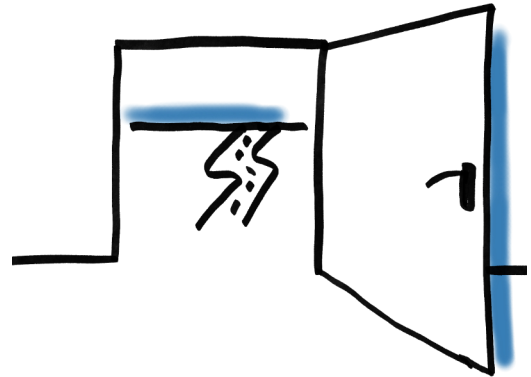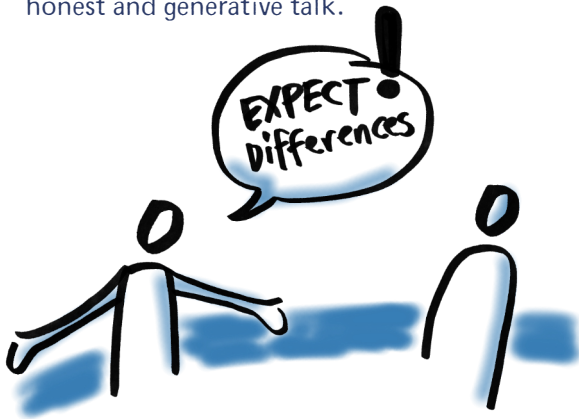
IT'S OKAY TO TAKE BREAKS AND FOR THINGS TO TAKE TIME: If the conversation becomes overwhelming or triggering, it might be helpful to take a break. Step away to calm down and ground yourself before continuing the discussion. Breaks allow for emotional regulation and prevent further escalation. But remember, some issues may require multiple conversations and ongoing efforts to address them. It's normal for resolutions to take time, so be patient and stay committed to the process by normalising the idea that not everything can be resolved immediately.

TOOLS

Affinity Groups: Exploring Positionality & Raising Awareness"

Addressing issues of power, privilege, and access can be intimidating when done alone. However, there is power in collectively exploring these topics with others who share similar experiences and identities. Affinity groups, also known as caucuses or separatist groups, provide a space for individuals to come together, share experiences, learn from one another, and build community before addressing these issues with a larger group. They offer a platform to acknowledge and confront experiences of oppression and power, heal together, and allow communities to move beyond a reliance on friend groups and clique-based organising.

The history of creating separatist affinity space is long and complex and spans several political, cultural, and social movements worldwide. Affinity groups are commonly based on or at the intersection of gender, sexuality, race, ethnicity, and religion and continue to be part of feminist, queer, and decolonial organising. In Europe, the roots of separatist QTIBIPoC organising can be traced back to the late 1980s with the Dutch queer of color collective, Strange Fruit.

The collective aimed to foster community and challenge racist and eurocentric conceptions of sexuality and gender. However, the creation of separatist affinity groups and collectives, where dominant groups are excluded, has faced criticism from those denied access to these spaces. Dominant groups, such as those benefiting from whiteness and cis-heteropatriarchy, have raised concerns about division, exclusion, and gone to the extremes of claiming that these groups are segregating the population in ways similar to the apartheid system in South Africa. Therefore, it is important to be prepared for potential backlash and retaliation when using this organising tool.

Nevertheless, it is crucial to understand that affinity spaces are distinct from segregation, which perpetuates racism and other structural oppressions. Instead, separatist affinity spaces serve as exploratory, healing environments and platforms for building collective power and solidarity with other marginalised groups and movements.

They allow people who break the norm in the dominant society to be the norm for once. They function as a method rather than an end goal, allowing marginalised individuals to temporarily retract to address their needs, before rejoining the dominant society and collectively transforming their circumstances.
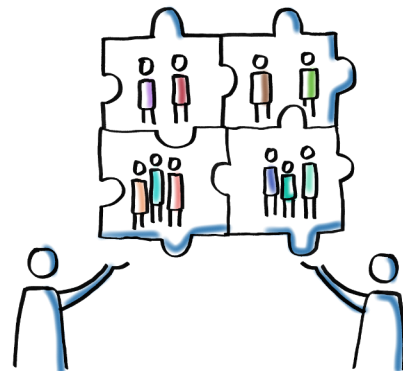
GUIDE FOR CREATING AFFINITY GROUPS

This guide provides a framework for creating affinity groups and is directly inspired by events that unfolded during the Cutie.BPoC Festival which took place in both Berlin and Copenhagen from 2015-2019. During the festival, an affinity space (the festival used the term caucus groups rather than affinity or separatist group) for Black QTIs was created to initiate a safer space from which to address and affirm experiences of anti-Black racism within the festival. It provided a platform from which to take collective action and bring awareness to the larger QTIBIPoC group attending the festival about the ways anti-Black racism was present in the space. By making anti-Blackness a collective issue, it empowered individuals to address the larger group together, rather than individually.

These collective actions led to the creation of a group of non-Black QTIPOC who facilitated a session called "Tackling Anti-Blackness within the nBPoC community" during the Cutie.BPoC festival Berlin in July 2019. The session resulted in the group compiling a list of resources that can be found in the resources section of this handbook. This is a great example that shows how affinity groups provide a space for sharing, building collective power to confront structural oppression, and building solidarity with the larger community.

Now, let's delve into the steps and considerations for creating effective affinity groups:

STEP 1: RECRUITING MEMBERS

Define who the group is for, its purpose, and how you will recruit people to join the space.

Some examples of affinity groups we came across in the nordics:

STEP 2: FACILITATING MEETINGS

Decide who will facilitate meetings, whether it is a shared responsibility or rotating among members. Facilitators should guide discussions, prepare agendas for the meetings, and manage time.
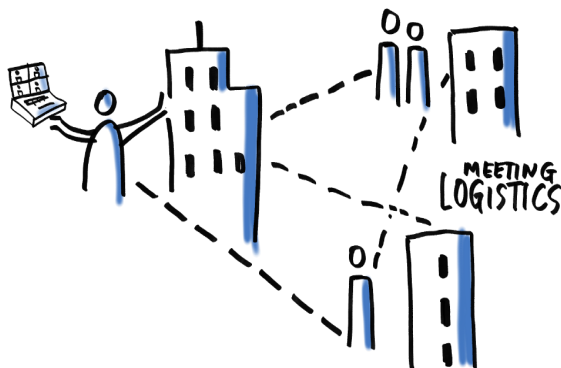
STEP 3: GROUP SIZE

Decide on the maximum number of members for the group. Decide if the group will close when reaching capacity or allow drop-ins.
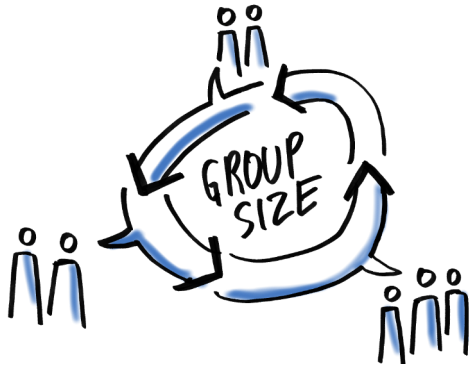

STEP 4: MEETING LOGISTICS

At the first meeting, agree on meeting locations, frequency, purpose, and meeting structure. Discuss what members of the group need in terms of comfort and accessibility.

STEP 5: STAYING IN TOUCH BETWEEN MEETINGS

Agree on how the group will stay in touch between meetings. Consider setting up a closed group on a social media platform or digital platform like Slack or Discord. Alternatively you could set-up a messaging thread on for example, WhatsApp or Signal.
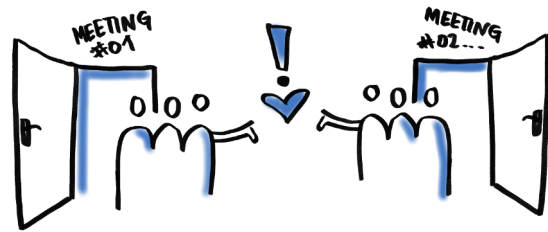
STEP 6: CREATING A SAFER SPACE

Discuss what you all need to feel comfortable and safe to participate in the space. Some ways you can create a sense of safety is by creating community agreements, agreeing to respect confidentiality and privacy among members, and creating a plan for how you will deal with conflict, discrimination, harassment, or disrespectful behavior within the group.
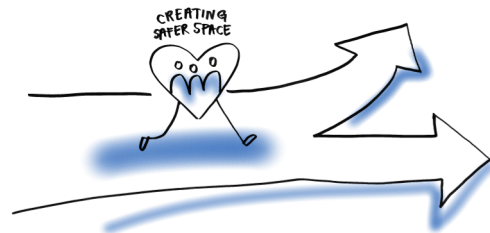
STEP 7: ENGAGEMENT WITH OTHER GROUPS OR THE LARGER COMMUNITY:

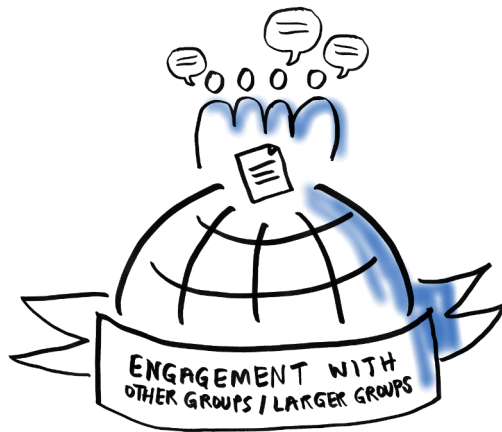Talk about the ways you want to take action and raise awareness about the issues affecting the members of your affinity group. This could be through participating in larger community events, or building solidarity with other groups by collaborating on joint events, activities, and direct action initiatives.

Attribution: We want to recognise and express our heartfelt thanks to the individuals and communities whose work, reflections, and organising inspired and directly contributed to the development of the tool in this chapter:

Fatima El-Tayeb, European Others: Queering Ethnicity in Postnational Europe.

Organisers and participants of the Cutie.BPOC festival that ran annually from 2015-2020.

GLIMPSES

INTO THE DIFFERENT LIVES AND EXPERIENCES OF QTIBIPOC IN THE NORDICS...

"At first, I felt invisible. In some ways, I still do. Unlike my Blackness and my connection to Islam, my queerness is not visible. And in some ways, this protects me from being ousted from my own ethnic community. And from direct homophobia and transphobia from strangers. But at the same time, it also works as a barrier between me and the queer community."

"We cannot talk about queer rights, without challenging the racist and anti-immigrant political rhetorics and politics at play"

"I've been trying to get gender-affirming care for over 4 years, and I learned early on that no such care is provided here in Kalaallit Nunaat. I need to move to Denmark to get the care I need. Right now, I'm on Zoladex, a treatment not even meant for gender affirmation. I'm still waiting for a more permanent treatment, but it's going extremely slowly"

"I wish I could be out and proud as a gay trans Sami man every day, without fear of discrimination for either of my identities"

"Tbh idgaf what wyte ppl think, but I've been hurt by some of the gestures coming from non-whites, especially other Black folks, these gestures of exclusion are the ones hurting the most"

"I am not taken seriously as a Black person, but as well as a Black asexual person. Black people, women especially, are hypersexualised in our already hypersexualised world (including queer sex/sexuality). So, as a Black asexual woman, you get diminished or left out"

"We are a lot of Muslims, but I don't think we talk so much about it together, like what does that mean, and how has it been post 9/11 and stuff, but also post the shootings at Utoya and the mosque in Norway and such, like we are being hunted down and harassed on the daily, it's not safe being a Muslim, but alhamdulillah you know"

"When you are QTIBIPoC, you have a lot of rights, but it is difficult to enact them because the state treats your issues separately. So if you have shit mental health because your lands are stolen, tough luck, they will not determine that as a good enough reason to fix anything".

"Even trans people who visit or want to move back are criminalised and get visits by the police because hormone therapy/medication is illegal in Kalaallit Nunaat"

"In general, I am very closeted about my heritage due to fears about discrimination and exotification within the queer community. I feel more accepted as a trans/queer person within the sami community than sami within the queer community"

"It's rare for me to come across a QTIBIPoC person who is also disabled, so thats something I usually don't have in common with community members"

"I feel at home in my body but not in this country"

"I have formed spaces for myself when I did not feel that the QTIBIPoC spaces represent me - spaces with friends who have a similar experience as me in Denmark, and other spaces I have created around music and culture"

"People don't understand the system violence faced by Bahai's in Iran, and Muslim Iranians don't realise or acknowledge Bahai's being jailed, killed, displaced, etc. At the same time, I cannot participate in Bahai activities. I don't feel safe there as a queer and trans person, and I have not been active in the community for many years"

SECTION 2
COMMUNITY & ORGANISING

"I believe that all organising is science fiction -
that we are shaping the future we long for and have not yet experienced."
– Adrienne Maree Brown

At the same time, the research revealed uneasiness, fear, and anxiety about being in a QTIBIPoC community. Not knowing why a community is coming together and what goals it is moving towards, seems to lead to conflicting assumptions that can cause harm, misunderstandings, and disappointment within the group.

Unfortunately, QTIBIPoC communities can be a space for a lot of hurt and trauma. The same factors that make these communities necessary (such as racism, homophobia, transphobia, and other intersecting forms of discrimination and structural violence) can also result in QTIBIPoC having to carry a big emotional burden. These traumas can manifest themselves in different ways and lead to challenges or conflict within QTIBIPoC communities.

Using the word "community" can evoke a feeling of togetherness, that unites different people through a shared narrative. From historical queer and trans movements, we have learned that community can be a crucial support network, a place to organise and advocate for rights – a way to shape the future we envision. However, since the word community is used in very different ways, and it can be difficult to know what it actually is, and if people you share "community" with have the same understanding as you do.

In our research, it was made clear that QTIBIPoC community, in whatever scale it existed, was important to people. Those we spoke to expressed that being part of the community helped them understand how different struggles are interconnected with various forms of oppression. It offered a space to be who you are and be recognised in your wholeness. Crucially, different QTIBIPoC communities have also provided practical support through access to essential resources like housing, employment, healthcare, and legal aid.

The purpose of building and being a part of a community can be to create a sanctuary or safer space away from the outside world. However, if we are not intentional, our communities might risk becoming microcosms of the same dominant culture we are turning away from. We all come with different experiences, traumas and privileges – and all these factors are present when we are in relation with others. Whatever community you are in, it will never be perfect, but you can be proactive about addressing the dynamics that come into play, the different power imbalances and hierarchies, and nurture structures that allow for conflict and resolution.

Through the interviews, we found that there can be an idealisation around "community" that places a lot of pressure on how to participate and interact. This makes it difficult for people to show up authentically as themselves. Also, it makes it harder for people to voice discomfort or harm in the community, being scared of disrupting the perceived harmony within the group. It's also worth acknowledging that being part of an intentional QTIBIPoC community isn't for everyone. Maybe you don't want or need that kind of relationship, and that's okay.

"EVERYONE HAS BAGGAGE OR WOUNDS. WE ARE ALL SOMETIMES BLINDED BY OUR OWN SADNESS WHICH COMES FROM OPPRESSION. NOT EVERYONE HAS THE OPPORTUNITY TO BE THERE FOR EVERYONE"

"IT HAS FORMED ME AS A PERSON WITH POTENTIALS AND FLAWS"

"I HAVE LEARNED A LOT, GOT FRIENDS, BECAME MORE RADICAL AND GAY"

COMMUNITY LESSONS

In our research, we identified some key insights and themes that are crucial in sustaining QTIBIPoC communities. These insights shed light on the dynamics, challenges, and opportunities that can arise, and offer some reflection questions to open up how to navigate them. They are based on the knowledge shared in the research.

Sustaining community

A reflection that came up a lot was the need for structures that can circulate organising knowledge and experience. This was in terms of ensuring QTIBIPoC were invited in and encouraged to participate, as well as to avoid the same few people holding a lot of responsibility and power. When few people sustain a community, the likelihood of burnout is high. This way of organising is very unsustainable because there is a constant drain when key individuals become exhausted and have to step away. It's important to look at the ways you organise and if it contributes to a burnout culture. Check out the resources section for more information and tools on burnout, and how to introduce more body awareness and somatic practices into your organising.

Community vs. Friends Building community is relational work. It's about shifting your thinking from the individual to the collective. However, many in the research recognised that being in community does not mean you must be friends with everyone. Community and friendships often overlap and blur. This can create a risk of the community becoming a clique and makes it difficult to enter for new people. And how do you navigate conflicts within a community where there are different friendships at stake?

Who belongs?

Many brought up the need to have conversations addressing who belongs in the QTIBIPoC community. For example, several times during our research, white-passing and light-skinned QTIBIPoC expressed not being sure as to whether they belong in QTIBIPoC separatist spaces. It's clear there is a general lack of communication about who the community is for, allowing informal dynamics of power to intentionally and unintentionally include and exclude people. This has resulted in people isolating from community spaces. Direct conversations can cut through this lack of clarity and insecurity. Using affinities within a community can also ease the discomfort of differences. This way, a QTIBIPoC community can be broadly defined yet make specific spaces that centre for example black muslim queers, trans feminine people, indigenous queers etc.

Hierarchy and power

Another consideration was around who takes leadership and how power dynamics manifest within communities. Some people reflected that lighter-skinned and/or mixed QTIBIPoC are often in leadership positions and have significant influence over decision-making processes. It's important to actively work against these dynamics by addressing intersectionality and privilege within the community, and how this relates to hierarchical structures and power imbalances. Have a look at the glossary for a definition of power, and the resources section for a power mapping tool.
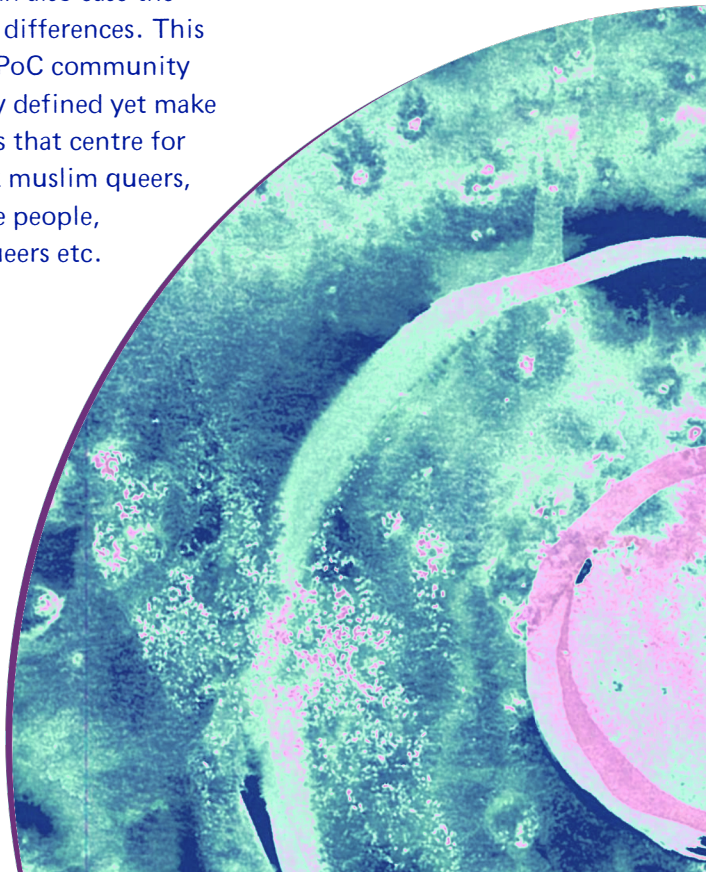
Nordic norms & assumptions
Growing up within the Nordics can mean a set of norms, such as ways of doing things, styles of communication, cultural references, and ways of seeing or understanding things. We found that these norms can be alienating to those raised outside of the Nordics, or more broadly, Europe or the "West". It can be difficult to step into this context and be part of a QTIBIPoC community and feel represented by it – especially if your reality is not acknowledged. The differences in navigating unfamiliar systems such as healthcare, the work sector, and visa regulations were brought up as examples of how varied lived experience can be as a migrant in the Nordics.

Connections to other struggles and movements Connecting with other movements, both locally and internationally, can build stronger and more sustainable communities since it allows for the sharing of resources, knowledge, strategies, and solidarity.Separatism can unite us and allow us to envision and work towards   the future we want, but this doesn't have to mean isolation from what is happening around us.

Accessibility Who is part of your community? What barriers prevent others from participating? Many people want to be part of a QTIBIPoC community but find it hard. What language are you organising in? Is there access to translation? Are the meeting spots you are using accessible to everyone? Is child care organised if it's needed? How is disability and neurodivergence considered in   community organising?

Intergenerational relations The issue of intergenerational relations came up across different contexts. Some of the reflections include: How does your community organising allow for intergenerational relations? What structures exist for passing down knowledge, stories, and strategies? How do we include people of different ages, from the children in the community to the elderly?

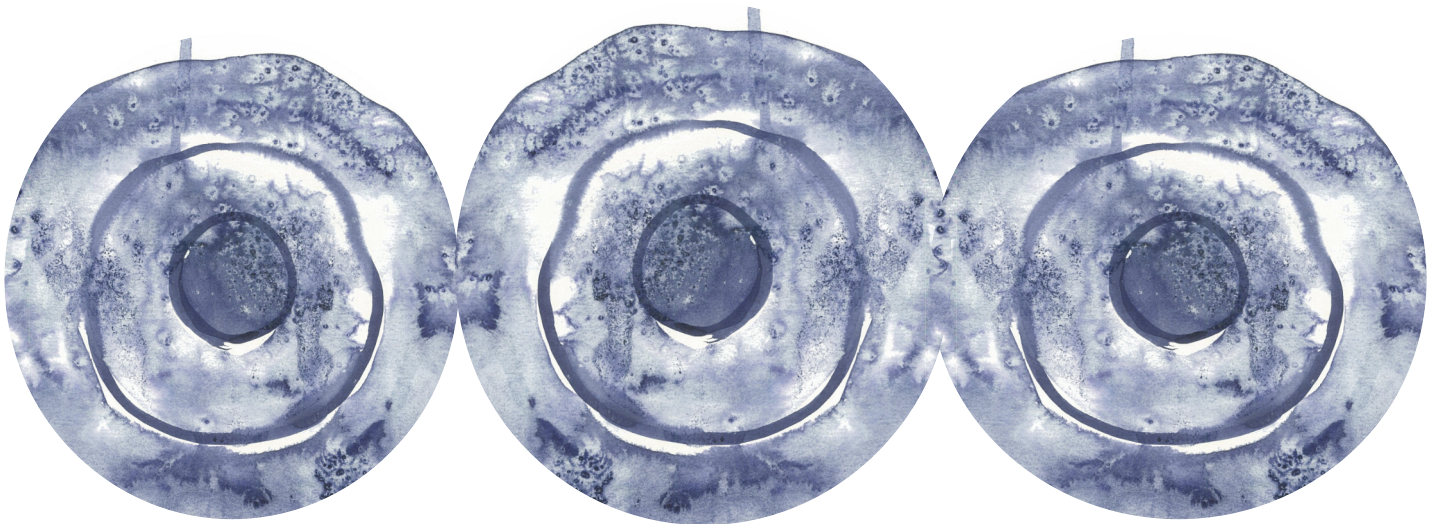**Non-alcohol centred spaces**
We found that many QTIBIPoC struggle to find a community that doesn't involve partying and alcohol. This can isolate and exclude those who seek sober spaces or those who prefer chill social interactions. How could you connect in other ways?

Across the Nordics, the QTIBIPoC community had different experiences, struggles, and hopes. We see this section as an invitation to critically examine the specifics of your surroundings and context, to cultivate communication and regular reflection on your goals, structures, and practices. This section will continue by sharing some questions for individual and collective reflection on the assumptions, fears, and expectations we all bring with us around community. It will also provide you with a tool for creating community agreements that help you address fears, barriers, or misaligned expectations.

REFLECTION QUESTIONS

It's clear that many of us don't really know what we mean when we say "community," nor have we taken the time to establish clear expectations with each other within our communities. A consequence of this lack of clarity is that when we don't know what we mean or what we expect of each other, there is more space for fear to grow, for misunderstandings to take place, and for us to let each other down. Below are some questions to get us reflecting, both individually and collectively, on the assumptions, fears, and expectations we all bring with us to larger social settings.

Feel free to reflect on these questions on your own or in larger group or community settings. We suggest you spend enough time reflecting individually on the questions before sharing your thoughts with the rest of the group. By the end of your discussion, we encourage you to see if you can come up with a collective definition of community and some actions you can take to address any fears, barriers, and misaligned expectations that have been brought up during the discussions.

WHAT IS A COMMUNITY ?

- What draws you to seeking out and being part of community?

- How do you personally define "community"?

- How does your definition of community differ from friendship-based connections and networks?

EXPECTATIONS

- What do you hope to receive from and contribute to a community? For instance, what kind of support, resources, or connections do you seek to receive and contribute with?

- What are some things that you do not think we should expect to give and receive from the community?

- How can we create a shared understanding of community expectations and values among all members?

FEAR

- What do you hope to receive from and contribute to a community? For instance, what kind of support, resources, or connections do you seek to receive and contribute with?

- What are some things that you do not think we should expect to give and receive from the community?

- How can we create a shared understanding of community expectations and values among all members?

BARRIERS

- What barriers do you encounter that prevent your full participation and sense of inclusion and belonging within community settings?

- How do power dynamics and unequal distributions of power impact your sense of belonging or ability to participate fully in a community?

- Have there been instances where your own power or privilege within the community may have unintentionally created barriers for others?
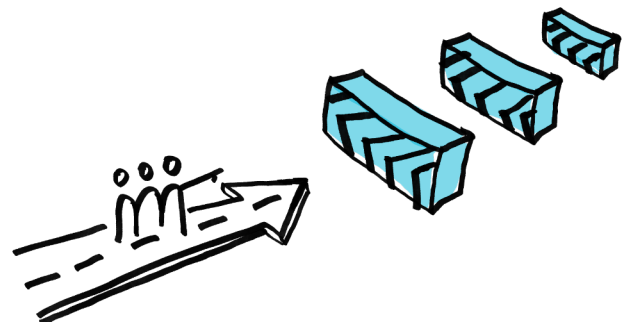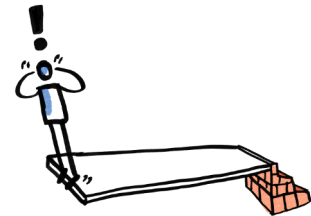
COMMUNITY AGREEMENTS

When we come together to build community under the umbrella term of QTIBIPoC, we are practicing the transformative act of establishing a relational culture with each other that can hold the complexity of our similar yet different intersecting identities and experiences. At times, this work will be difficult and messy, but doing so, adrienne maree brown reminds us, "is integral to how we dismantle the current state and build new ways of being with each other."

Building a community culture that is open, trusting, supportive, and where we can show up as our full selves, is not something that just happens. It takes intention and deliberate action to create this, otherwise, we risk defaulting to the norms of the dominant culture and reproducing the same harmful and exclusionary behaviors that brought us together in the first place. This is where community agreements play an important role. By establishing them early on, we begin a collective journey of shaping the kind of culture we hope to create and be in together.

SO, WHAT IS A COMMUNITY AGREEMENT?

In Emergent Strategy, adrienne maree brown defines community agreements as:

"The first moments in a gathering where you invite folks into a collective practice of culture building. Here you build consent for a collective endeavor, and consent is integral to any experiment. Community agreements provide an opening for a conversation about culture and a written document of the collective vision of the practice you all will be in together."

In other words, community agreements provide a common vision for how we aspire to be in relation to each other and work together to build a trusting and open community where we all feel heard, supported, honoured, and respected.

WORKSHOP TEMPLATE
CREATING COMMUNITY AGREEMENTS

FACILITATION HACKS FOR A SMOOTHER PROCESS:

- **Appoint a Facilitator**: make sure someone or a few people are responsible for facilitating the workshop. This helps create a smoother process and ensures participants are engaged.

- **Appoint a Timekeeper**: to ensure that the workshop stays on track and follows the agenda.

- **Allocate more time than you think**: discussions often take longer than expected, so it's best to over-allocate time rather than under-allocate time to avoid rushing through points.

- **Use Icebreakers and Energisers**: at the start of workshops and after breaks to engage participants and keep them energised.

- **Include breaks**: aim for having 10-15 minute breaks per hour to allow participants to rest and reset.
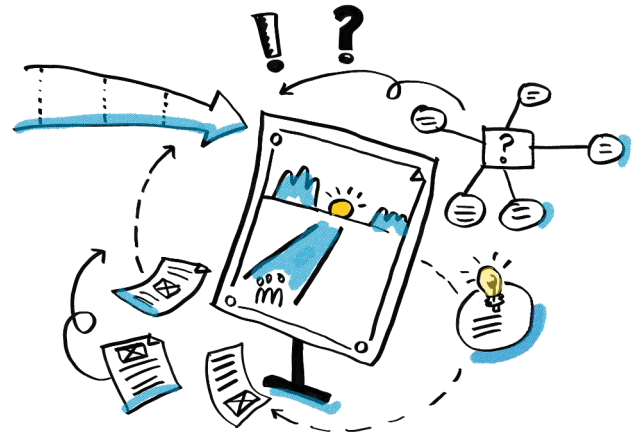
STEP ONE: PREPARING WORKSHOP STRUCTURE & CONTENT

1. Depending on the number of participants, delegate someone or a working group to plan and lead the workshop.

2 . Consider the following before the workshop:

- Develop a clear definition of community agreements.

- Understand the distinctions between agreements, rules, and norms.

- Differentiate between relational and operational community agreements. Relational agreements cover the ways you want to relate to and treat each other. Operational agreements cover the ways you structure how you come together and organise e.g. how often you meet, how you communicate between physical meetings, whether you need a facilitator etc.

- Discuss the importance and benefits of having community agreements.

3 . Optional: Gather examples of community agreements used by different groups and communities for reference. Have a look in the resources section for inspiration.

STEP TWO: DESIGNING THE PROCESS

There are several ways to engage people in the process of collectively creating community agreements. Below we present one approach you can use, however, feel free to modify it and change it to suit your context and needs.

But firstly, a few things to keep in mind when designing and leading the workshop:

Ensure the process is consensus-driven, meaning decisions are made collectively with everyone's agreement. Make sure the final agreements reflect the needs of all participants by ensuring full participation and including everyone's voices.

Emphasize that agreements are not fixed and should evolve over time to reflect the changing needs of the community. By the end of the workshop, ensure everyone commits to honoring the agreements and being accountable when they are broken.
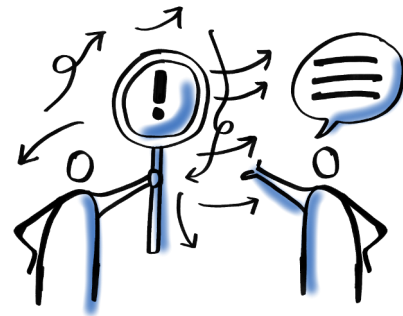
WORKSHOP STRUCTURE

1) Introduction:
Begin by setting the stage:

- Explain the workshop's purpose and aims.

- Outline the agenda and how the session will flow.

- Share your hopes for what the group will accomplish.

- Encourage participants to ask questions and offer comments.

This introduction sets the tone for the workshop and ensures everyone is aligned with its goals and expectations.

2) Presenting Workshop Content:
Next, present core concepts:

- **Community Agreements**: Define what community agreements are and why they are important.

- **Relation and Organisational Agreements**: Differentiate between relational and organisational agreements, and why we need both.

- **Distinguish Agreements from Norms and Rules**: Clarify the differences between norms, rules, and agreements to avoid confusion during the workshop as these terms tend to be used interchangeably.

Throughout the presentation, encourage active participation by inviting feedback, questions, and suggestions for refining definitions and concepts.

3) Guiding the Conversation:

Now, to move the conversation forward:

- **Select the Best Format**: choose a conversation format to suit the group dynamics. Consider factors like group size, participants' familiarity with each other, and their comfort level in large group settings.

- **Blend Different Formats**: Combine various discussion formats to accommodate different needs and preferences. We suggest a combination of individual reflection time, small group discussions for those less comfortable in larger settings, and larger group discussions for collective decision-making.
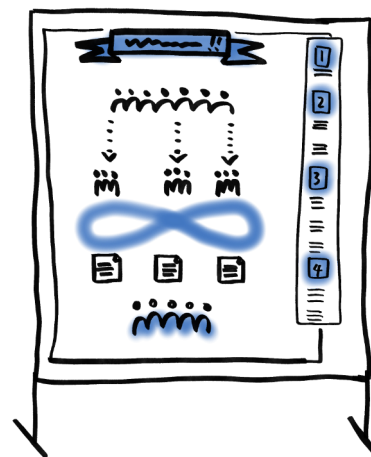
For example, you could start with:

- **Individual Reflection**: ask participants to reflect individually on their desired community agreements using provided prompts: for example, what would increase your sense of safety in community settings?

And after, move to:

- **Small Group Work**: divide participants into smaller groups to share their reflections or collectively brainstorm new agreements. By the end, each group should be ready to present their agreements to the larger group.
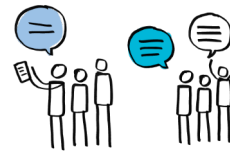
You could also incorporate:

- **Mind-Mapping**: use mind-maps as a visual brainstorming tool, either individually or in groups, to visually represent ideas when you need a less talk-heavy format.
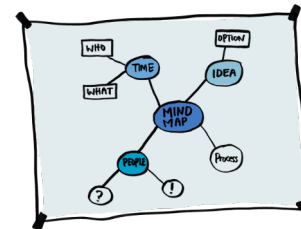
And, at the end:

- **Facilitate Whole Group Discussion**: Invite each small group to present their top agreements to the larger group. Create space for other groups to ask questions or suggest changes. Make sure there is consensus on each agreement. If there is no consensus on an agreement, revisit until there is or set aside.
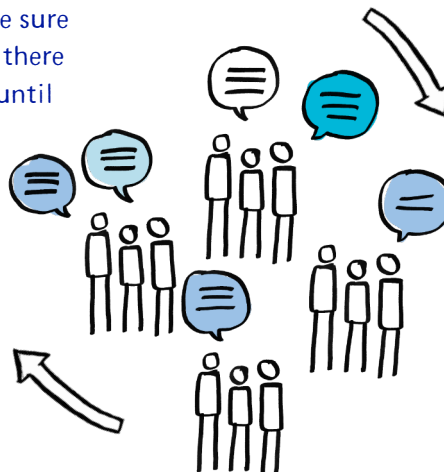
STEP THREE:
WRAPPING UP THE WORKSHOP:

- Summarise the outcomes and discuss the next steps in the process.

- Consider assigning someone to finalise the agreements before a second meeting where they can be revisited and given final collective approval.

It's quite common that after creating and agreeing on community agreements, groups, and communities forget to return to them. Over time, neglecting agreements can, unfortunately, lead to hurt feelings, distrust, and conflict in the community. To avoid this, we encourage you to agree on how you will make sure your agreements become an active part of how you are in community together:

HERE ARE TWO WAYS YOU CAN DO THIS:

- At the start of each meeting or gathering, and especially when new members join, introduce the community agreements and have them read out loud to the group. Create space for questions and commentary to ensure everyone understands and consents to following the agreements. Make sure to offer translations of the agreements to those who need them.

- Have a recurring point on meeting agendas to reflect individually or in pairs on one of the agreements. For instance, reflect on how you're applying agreement x and what it means to you.

SECTION 3
POTENTIALS & TENSIONS OF WORKING IN NGOS

As part of our research process, we saw that it was important that we [the core research group] also took part as research participants in the project to critically explore our role in the organisations we represent and the larger NGO sector. To do this, we all took part in a workshop during a weekend work retreat in Sweden. The workshop's aim was to create a platform from which to reflect individually and collectively on the potentials, tensions, and limitations of working in the NGO sector as QTIBIPoC. The goal was to share tools and strategies we use to navigate these environments, and gather advice to support other QTIBIPoC who currently work or will work in NGOs that serve members of this community.

Each member of our group has been involved in the growing QTIBIPoC movement in the Nordics, as activists and, once this project started, as professionals working in NGOs. Since the start of the project, some of us have continued to work in the same NGOs, while others have shifted to new organisations or have even left the NGO sector altogether. These transitions reflect the various tensions that exist within the NGO sector, especially within organisations whose target group are QTIBIPoC, where we find ourselves in a unique and challenging insider/outsider position.

The insider/outsider position refers to the experience of individuals who belong to a particular community or identity group but work within organisations where they are minoritised. In the context of our workshop, most of us find ourselves in this insider/outsider position in the NGOs we still or used to represent. We are insiders because we are employed within organisations that work with community issues. However, we are also outsiders because we may be the only QTIBIPoC in a predominantly white-run organisation. Navigating this position involves balancing the demands of professionalism with staying true to our identities, values, politics and the needs of our communities.

MINORITISATION

Minoritisation refers to a process where people are perceived as belonging to a minority group and experience marginalisation because of this. Minoritisation is often used to intentionally challenge the term "minority". Minoritisation does not happen due to the lack of numbers of a group (being in minority), but because certain groups of people are perceived as being less deserving and inferior. For example, billionaires are a minority in numbers, but they do not experience being minoritized or disenfranchised. Similarly, many white people in the global south still hold a privileged position although being in minority. Others have shifted this belief by using the concept of global majority.

A SNAPSHOT OF THE WORKSHOP

1ST PERSON

"I wish I dared to question or be critical earlier in my employment towards how things were done in the organisation. But it's hard when you're the first QTIBIPoC they've hired. It's a lot of pressure and feels like if things don't go well, I'll ruin the opportunity for others like me in the future..."

2ND PERSON

"I really relate to that feeling... And there are so many vampires in NGO work. White people really know how to suck your energy and power..."

3RD PERSON

"Right? They expect you to share knowledge and skills from your lived experience with the organisation but don't compensate you for it. Like being expected to suddenly teach white colleagues about racism during a lunchbreak"

4TH PERSON

"Yes, this! And being asked to attend public events or give a speech so they don't just have an all white crew of the people there. When that's actually who is leading and running the organisation..."

INSIGHTS

- We discussed how it's easier to set-up and formalise organisational infrastructure and power within NGOs for more sustainable and long-term work. From our experience, grassroots organising often suffers from a lack of formal structures, informal power hoarding, difficulty in making decisions, and a lack of long-term momentum. We found that it's easier to avoid some of these issues in NGOs. We have seen how it ensures more long-term sustainability, easier decision-making processes, and makes it easier to point out and address where power is centred within the organisation.

- We talked about the widespread influence of white supremacy culture within our organisations, where the demands of professionalism often clash with the needs of the community. One way this shows up is through a continued sense of urgency that makes it nearly impossible to make long term plans or consider the consequences of rushed decision-making. Unfortunately, these rushed decisions often end up harming the communities we serve by over prioritising the needs of people in power i.e funds and politicians.

- We addressed the dynamic of extraction of our members' knowledge and suffering within NGOs, and how funding is often tied to the continued oppression and victimisation of marginalised communities. This extractive nature is made even worse by the prioritisation of relationships with funders over the needs of the communities we serve. This creates a sense of accountability within the organisation that is more aligned with financial interests than the needs and well-being of the community.

- We talked about the challenges of working in an environment where our personal identities and lived experiences are often tokenized and used for organisational gain. This dynamic means QTIBIPoC staff are often valued more for their identity and how they make the organisation "look diverse" rather than for their skills and contributions. This dynamic can take an emotional toll and can ultimately lead to burn out, as we are pressured to continually compromise our values and radical politics for the organisation's benefit.

WHAT DO QTIBIPOC'S ACROSS THE NORDICS NEED FROM NGOS?

"Be somehow more community based. Already the fact that it's an organisation makes me wary because I wonder if the state and how radical their views could possibly be"

"I'm afraid of showing up and feeling like I don't belong ... it hurts to feel like you don't belong in a room full of white people, but it hurts even more to feel like you don't belong in a room full of brown people"

"Create spaces that are not only parties but actually open up for debate"

"Class consciousness and accessibility always prioritised"

"Bringing back the forgotten stories, lost words about indigenous people past way of living, before religious institution and colonization ruined the view of 2SLGBTQIA+ community

"Hire, utilise more non-white queer people, as mentioned here QTIBIPoCs... Don't expect free labour from non-white queer people"

"Have intersectional awareness, strive to always be intersectional"

"Practical politics in the form of mutual aid, community building intiatives, coalition building, direct action tactics. Providing (permanent) physical spaces that foster this. Supporting QTIBIPoC being well fed and housed, employed if necessary"

"Not only have white queers on the board/within the organisation... Work on understanding their whiteness!"

"Better mental health resources... Help specifically for refugees and trans people with their needs"

REFLECTION QUESTIONS

We put together a few questions to help you reflect on your experiences and develop strategies to navigate the complex dynamics of working in NGOs as QTIBIPoC. These prompts are intended to deepen your understanding of your experiences and feelings in the workplace. We acknowledge the risk and vulnerability of advocating for yourself and raising critique in professional settings, especially when you are isolated and minoritsed, and urge you to do so only if it feels safe and won't negatively impact your well-being and job security.

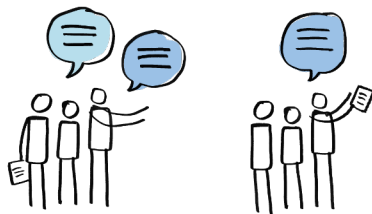1. How does white supremacy culture manifest within your workplace, and what impact does it have on your work?

2. How does the pursuit of funding opportunities shape the organisation's priorities and alignment with community needs?

3. Do you find yourself expected to perform tasks beyond what is outlined in your job description, especially those that are related to your identity or lived experience? Reflect on these experiences and how it makes you feel.

4. What compromises have you had to make when balancing professional expectations with the needs and values of your communities? How have these compromises impacted your social life and mental well-being?

5. What self-care practices and boundaries can you establish to prevent burnout and maintain or recover your physical, psychological and emotional well-being?

SOME ADVICE FOR QTIBIPOC WORKING IN NGOS

1. **Create peer-groups**: In the Nordics, QTIBIPoC often find themselves as the only QTIBIPoC, let alone BIPOC, in predominantly white-run organisations. This experience can be isolating, alienating, and at worst, harmful. Creating a peer-group can be a powerful way to find support and a space to decompress and reflect. Figure out what matters most to you. Checkout other workplaces in your area and scan for people that you might want to invite. In professional peer-groups, you might want to invite people who do similar work – for example coordination, communication, teaching, leadership etc. This way, the group can be both a space for personal support and professional learning.

2. **Don't wait for the right moment**: Don't wait until things are calm to address and tackle issues in NGO work. There's always some form of crisis, whether it's funding-related or community-based. So, it's important to address challenges as they arise, rather than waiting for the perfect moment. Try finding allies and ask them to actively support you in these conversations.

3. **Name the issue**: This can be helpful when tension arises and underlying issues are being swept under the rug. It's a difficult one, but try starting slow and practising this muscle. This could be something like: "I can sense some tension in this conversation. Can we address it and figure out what is causing it before moving on?". Remember that naming the issue doesn't make you responsible for solving it. Rather, this can help you set boundaries and understand what is and isn't your responsibility.

4. **Set and hold boundaries**: Don't wait for the perfect time to set a boundary with your boss, colleagues or volunteers. The workload might seem never-ending, but your well-being should always come first. Many professionals in the NGO sector struggle with stress, burnout, and setting boundaries. For QTIBIPoC, there's the added emotional toll of working in predominantly white organisations and in a field that's personal and related to your own experiences, making it hard to leave work at work. So, it's crucial to learn to set work-life boundaries and take care of yourself before things get critical. Try reflecting on your hard and soft boundaries. Set structures to uphold them - e.g. don't have your work email on your personal phone, don't give out your personal number, don't answer messages after a certain hour etc.

"One of the main reasons I joined the project [Rivers in Resistance] was to connect with other QTIBIPOCs working in NGOs that also serve racialised LGBTQ+ people. I felt very lonely at work and needed a space to be mirrored, share advice and support each other... This was probably the best part of being part of the project"

OUR REFLECTIONS

We want to take the time to consider the process of our research project and the creation of the handbook because it's an important part of being transparent about the strengths and limitations of our work, the critique we received along the way, and to ensure we carry these lessons forward.

The planning of the project was very ambitious. This is unfortunately inherent when applying for funding. We aimed to gather and create research and knowledge from an intersectional perspective, offer practical tools for future organising as well as establish a transregional network of QTIBIPoC organisations, groups and communities. Sadly, neither the capacity nor the resources for the network-building was there. We hope that this can be realised in the near future, a space for organisers across the Nordic region to meet each other and start planting the seeds of collaboration.

The issue of capacity and resources was central to our process and meant we had to scale down and be realistic about the limitations of operating as a low-budget research project with limited hours. This affected our original intentions for how we would work together within the collective. We had envisioned a more collaborative co-creation process, with regular workshops to develop content and tools.

Unfortunately, throughout the project, the realities of working within NGO's as QTIBIPoC became acutely evident. Burnout, precarity and unpaid labour has affected the ways in which we could show up for this project which took away from the collaborative intentions.

One limitation of the project that we have considered throughout is the issue of talking broadly about the "Nordics", when each area has a different history and QTIBIPoC experience and organising differs from place to place. This broad approach means that regional differences were sometimes lost, as we couldn't delve deeply into each specific context. However, the content and tools we developed consider the shared needs and reflections across these diverse contexts.

We aimed to be intentional in how we gathered research material, we did this in a number of ways. We provided financial contributions to those we interviewed and

& LESSONS

who participated in workshops, acknowledging the value of their time and knowledge. Unfortunately, this wasn't the case for the surveys as it was difficult to administer. We were made aware that the survey was quite long and draining, depending on the experiences you have lived, and we recognise that these participants should have been prioritised for financial contributions as well.

We received a critique from someone who participated in the survey that we would like to share. It was around the level of intersectionality, and considered how the survey lacked direct questions about disability, neurodivergence, socioeconomic background, growing up in rural or metropolitan areas, and educational background. We take this reflection with us and recognize how it impacts the material we gather. To avoid making the survey too long, we chose to ask broader questions about experiences in different settings, hoping to capture the specificities of our respondent's lives while prioritising a few intersections. We recognise this as a significant limitation of the research and are very grateful to those of you who raised this critique. Your feedback is invaluable to us and helps us improve our future work.

Other limitations include not reaching as many people as we had hoped, particularly lacking enough perspectives from Iceland, Sápmi, the Faroe Islands, Åland, and Kalaallit Nunaat. Extending the project timeline would have allowed for more networking and outreach, so the research reached more people. Additionally, the research and handbook are in English. With more resources, we would have loved the opportunity to conduct the research and publish the handbook in local languages.

Overall, we see this project as part of an ongoing effort to support QTIBIPoC and their communities in the Nordics. This is not a final product, and there is much more work to be done. The wealth of research material gathered could have filled several handbooks. For now, it remains open how we will continue to build on this foundation and further develop this research. We also encourage and welcome other QTIBIPoC in the Nordics to build on this work, reach out if this is you.

GLOSSARY

Ableism Ableism is a set of beliefs or practices that devalue and discriminate against people with physical, intellectual, or psychiatric disabilities. Ableism also means prioritizing the needs and likes of non-disable people.

Anti-Blackness Anti-blackness is the inability to recognize Black humanity by positioning Black people and their cultural practices and knowledge as inferior, sub-standard, or needing to imitate others.

Asylum Seeker An asylum seeker is a person that has left their own country of origin and is seeking permission to stay in another country and/or international protection

Colourism Colorism refers to discrimination or prejudice against individuals with a darker skin tone, typically within the same racial or ethnic group, where lighter skin tones are often favored or considered more desirable than darker skin tones.

Equality and Equity Equality means that everyone is given the same opportunities, resources and are treated the same way, regardless of differences. Equity means recognizing that each individual has different circumstances and providing them with the resources and opportunities they need to reach an equal outcome.

Grassroots Organising Grassroots organising refers to a form of bottom-up mobilisation by community members. It typically involves people coming together to address issues, advocate for change, or promote awareness on a particular issue. Grassroots organising often focuses on building people power, which means creating collective ways of driving change and empowering people with knowledge and skills to organise in groups.

Heteronormativity The assumption that heterosexuality is the standard for defining normal sexual behavior. Heteronormativity assumes the gender binary is the natural and immutable essentials in normal human relations. A heteronormative society is structured morally, socially, and legally to position other forms of sexuality as deviant and to discriminate against non-heterosexuals.

Infrastructure In activism and movement building, infrastructure refers to building systems around the work you do collectively. Building infrastructure in communities starts with understanding what you do, why you do it, what your visions are and how you get there. Building infrastructure means creating the foundational systems and networks needed for effective and sustained activism, such as communication channels, leadership structures, and collaborative networks.

Intersectionality Intersectionality is an analytical framework that describes the ways power structures based on gender, race, ethnicity, sexual orientation, gender identity, disability, class and other social identities "intersect" to shape the experience of each individual.

Islamophobia Islamophobia is commonly defined as the fear, prejudice, or discrimination against Muslims. It can manifest in various forms, including stereotypes, negative attitudes, or harmful actions toward individuals or communities based on their Islamic faith.

Norms Norms are unwritten rules or expectations defining acceptable and appropriate actions or behavior within a group or community. Norms are shared and sustained by social sanctions. If people conform to the norm, they expect to be socially accepted or rewarded; if they do not conform, they expect to be socially punished or excluded.

Norm criticism Norm criticism is a method used when studying power structures within society. The aim is to shift focus from individuals, who are seen as different, to analysing social structures and questioning what is considered to be "normal". Using norm criticism helps us visualise how norms affect individuals.

Patriarchy Patriarchy is a system of political, social, and economic relations and institutions structured around gender inequality. Within this system men and masculinity hold the primary power, are predominant in roles of political leadership, moral authority, social privilege and control of property.

Positionality Positionality refers to where one is located in relation to their various social identities, such as gender, race, ethnicity, sexual orientation etc. The combination of these identities and their intersections shape how one understands and engages with the world around them.

Power Power can be defined as the capacity to influence, lead, dominate, or otherwise have an impact on the life and actions of others in society. The concept of power encompasses but is not limited to, the notion of authority. Unlike authority, which implies legitimacy, power can be exercised illegitimately.

Privilege Privilege refers to certain social advantages, benefits, or degrees of prestige and respect that an individual has by virtue of belonging to certain social identity groups, such as race, gender and sexuality.

Racialisation Racialisation is a concept that describes how individuals and groups of people are ascribed different meanings depending on race, ethnicity, appearance and cultural markers. In the Nordic context, it is often used to challenge the conception that racism is based on a person's race and rather see how racism happens through a process of being perceived as e.g. aggressive, loud, angry, different, dangerous, untrustworthy, lazy, submissive, sexualised etc.

Refugee A refugee is a person who has fled their own country because of well-founded fear of persecution due to race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group or political opinion or is escaping conflict or violence. They are not able to or, doesn't wish to seek their own country's protection or safety

Systemic racism Systemic racism is defined by racism within the policies and practices that exist throughout society or an organization. By being deeply imbedded in systems such as laws, written/unwritten policies, established beliefs, and attitudes, racism is continously reproduced throughout all layers and structures of society.

Whiteness Whiteness refers to the construction of the white race and the system of oppression that affords white people privileges and advantages through laws, policies, media, schools, corporations, institutions, juridical systems, institutions, freedom of movements, healthcare systems etc. In a Nordic context, whiteness can be used to describe a racial hierarchy that makes white people's physical features, cultural traditions and social behaviors into the norm and more desirable. This is often perceived as invisible for white people themselves, but becomes very apparent for BIPOC entering white spaces.
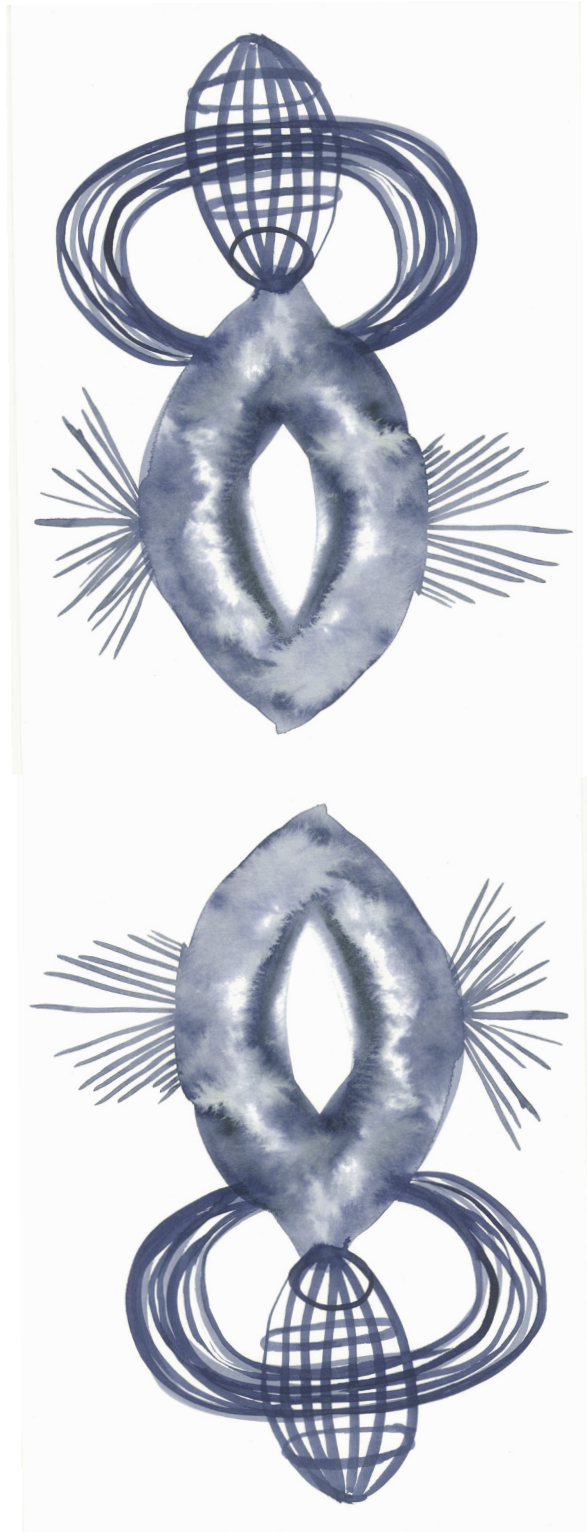
RESOURCES

PODCASTS

Becoming The People
Podcast,
By Prentis Hemphill
Healing, Resilience and
Power
Community Care: Prentis
Hemphill
& Francisca Porchas
Coronado
On Choosing Belonging
Resist and Renew Podcast
The Emergent Strategy
Podcast
Octavia's Parables
Possibilities Podcast
Red Library
Emergent Liberation
Collective
Hurry Slowly
Organizing Ideas
Have a Nice Life
Know Better Do Better
Practical Radicals

BOOKS

Emergent Strategy: Shaping
Change, Changing Worlds, by
adrienne maree brown
Like Rooting in Quicksand
(stories of LGBTI+
newcomers), LGBT Asylum
The Politics of Trauma:
Somatics, Healing, and Social
Justice, by Staci Haines
Pleasure Activism: The
Politics of Feeling Good, By
adrienne maree brown
Undrowned: Black Feminist
Lessons from Marine
Mammals, by Alexis Pauline
Gumbs
We Will Not Cancel Us: And
Other Dreams of
Transformative Justice, by
adrienne maree brown
Holding Change: The Way of
Emergent Strategy
Facilitation and Mediation, By
adrienne maree brown
How We Show Up: Reclaiming
Family, Friendship, and
Community, By Mia Birdsong

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SCAN , FOR
DIGITAL READ

RIVERS IN RESISTANCE

FURTHER
RESOUCRES
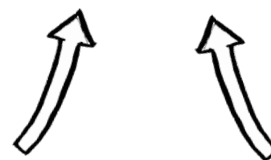
ORGANISATIONS

Tamam Luna is a 3-year-long project, financed by Allmäna Ärvsfonden in Sweden. Tamam Luna is a meeting place for young people between 13 and 25 years old, who identify as LGBTQIA+, wonder about their sexuality or gender identity, and are BIPOC. The project aims to support its members with regular activities, the help of a counsellor and the youth leader working at the space.

Salam is a organization that promotes an inclusive and safe environment for lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer and other gender non-conforming people with a Muslim background in Norway. We aim to actively work to offer safe spaces for freedom of expression, acceptance, inclusion, belonging and friendship.

LGBT Asylum is an NGO and group of LGBTQI+ people – asylum seekers, refugees, Danish citizens, and persons residing in Denmark. LGBT Asylum works with improving the conditions and rights of lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer, and intersex persons who seek asylum or live as refugees in Denmark – by support and legal counselling throughout the asylum and integration process, by offering a psychosocial LGBTQI+ network, and by advocacy work. LGBT Asylum has its headquarters in Copenhagen and a local group in Aarhus.
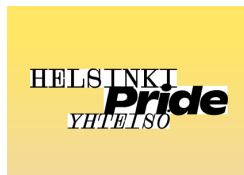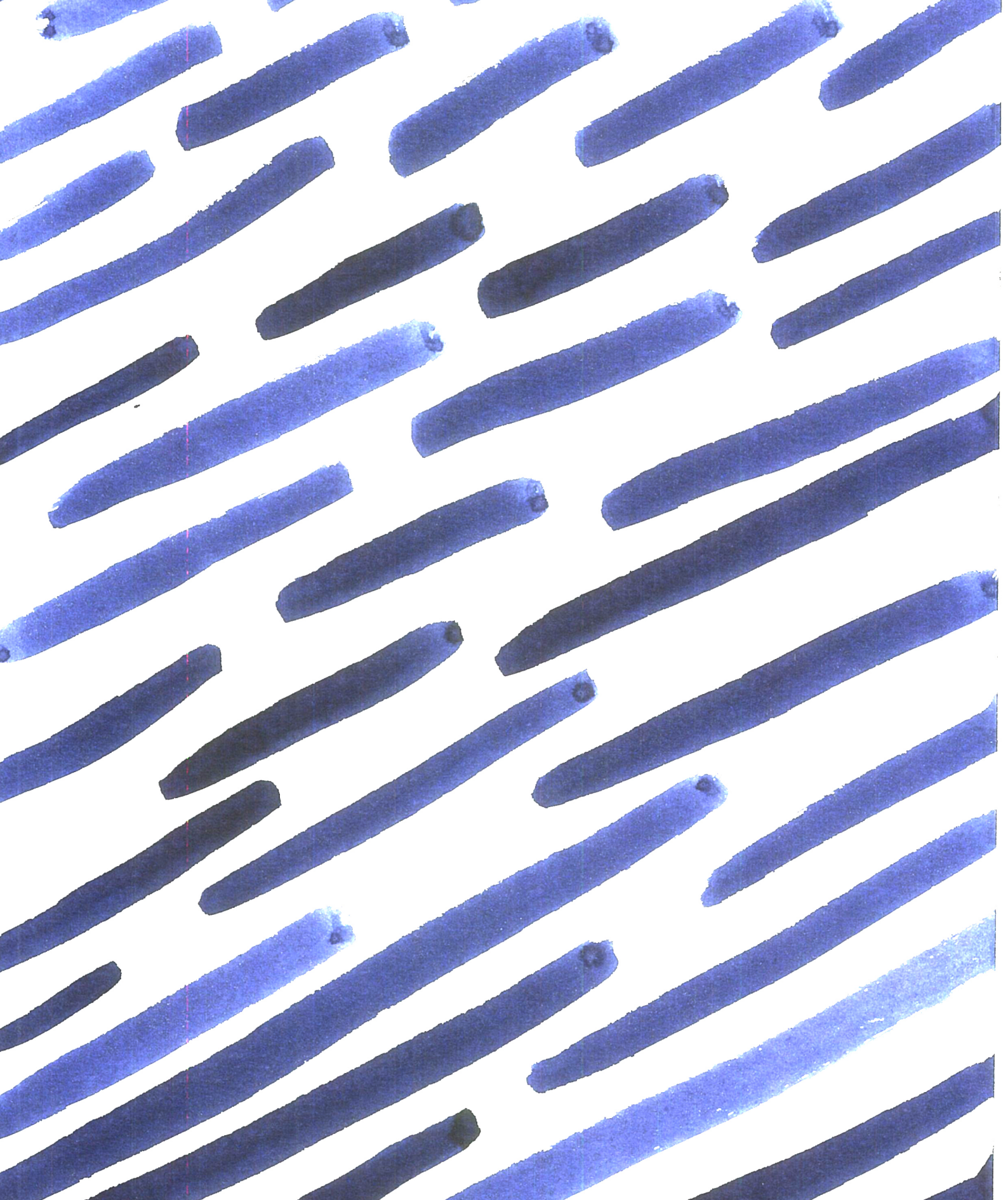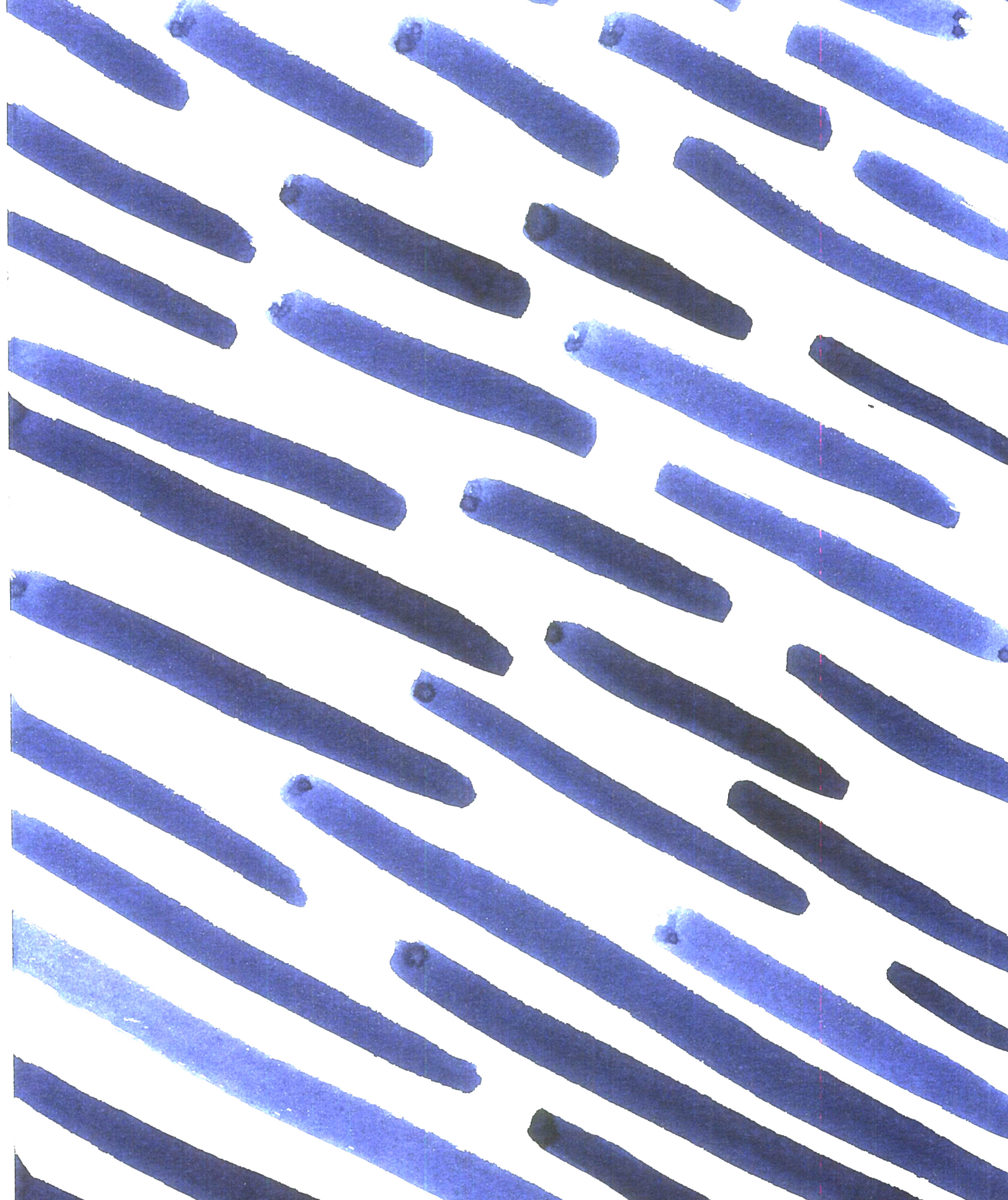
Helsinki Pride Community is a human rights and non-governmental organisation that provides a wide range of year-round social, youth and community work and offers training and consultancy services. Helsinki Pride Community oganizes Helsinki Pride, Finland's largest human rights and cultural event. We are an NGO that was established in 1991 and it's Finland's largest rainbow-specific LGBTIQA+ human rights organization promoting the rights and well-being of sexual and gender minorities.

Normstormerne is a young queer educational project that offers normcritical workshops in schools and daycares. Its mission is to make norm-critical pedagogy accessible and useful for everyone who wants to create safe and inclusive environments for children and young people.

REPETITION
IS A FORM OF
CHANGE

RIVERS IN RESISTANCE

A HANDBOOK FOR QTIBIPOC IN THE NORDICS