Minority Women and the Routinisation of Crisis: A Challenge for Sociology

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Paper presented to the 7th ECPR General Conference,
4th-7th September 2013, Bordeaux

Abstract

This article seeks to develop a new ‘sociological imagination’ for the study of economic crises and austerity politics by foregrounding minority women’s experiences and political mobilisations. In this article, we explore the dynamics of gender, ‘race’, ethnicity and economic crisis by examining how intersectionality can be combined with aspects of C. Wright Mills’ (1959) sociological imagination to create a new analytical tool for naming, understanding and legitimating minority women’s everyday experiences. Combining the sociological imagination with intersectionality allows us to highlight ‘routinised crises’—those persistent, institutionalised and ordinary hardships that many marginalised groups (and minority women in particular) experience in their everyday lives. Stressing the importance of routinised crises
may help us resist the temptation of disproportionately focusing on the
exceptional crises of the economically privileged during these uncertain
economic times and makes visible minority women’s responses to these challenges.

**Keywords:** race, ethnicity, gender, crisis, austerity, intersectionality, sociological imagination

**Introduction**

This article introduces a new sociological imagination for the study of ‘crisis’ and its asymmetrical effects on particular social groups. The need for a new analytical tool to better examine ‘crisis’ was prompted by our comparative research project, *Minority Women’s Activism in Tough Times*¹, which seeks to explore the challenges and opportunities for minority women’s grassroots activism and third sector organizations in times of austerity in France and the United Kingdom. Our research has shed light on two important phenomena.

Firstly, we found that many (but not all) third sector actors were actively adopting neoliberal principles and practices in order to secure their legitimacy with institutional elites and ensure their survival during these uncertain economic times (Emejulu and Bassel 2013). Secondly, we found that many of the minority women activists we interviewed did not perceive their experiences and

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¹ Working with third sector organisations and minority women activists, the project explores how these civil society actors are organising and mobilising against austerity. We were particularly interested in: how minority women activists define, understand and take action against austerity; how the crisis is defined and legitimated by state actors; and how organisations working with the most marginalised groups are impacted by austerity and how they incorporate minority women’s needs and interests into their organisational practices. We conducted 52 semi-structured interviews and focus groups with minority women activists, civil servants in local and national government and a cross-section of directors, policy officers and development workers in anti-poverty, housing rights and migrants rights third sector organisations in Scotland, England and France from September 2011 to August 2013.
economic hardships as ‘new’ but rather as continuation of an already precarious economic and social existence. Throughout our research project we have been constantly struck by the contradiction of examining phenomena that appeared to be new but when placed in the context of minority women’s lives, these developments seemed to be, in fact, a sharpening and a prolongation of these women’s ordinary and everyday experiences of inequality. We argue that there is a bias embedded within the conception of the 2008 economic crisis and subsequent austerity measures which appears to generate real contradictions and dilemmas for understanding minority women’s experiences. It seems that by using this dominant understanding of ‘crisis’, we are in fact perpetuating an unacknowledged process of marginalisation of minority women’s experiences of hardship and excluding these experiences from policy responses by elite actors (Strolovich 2013). Due to the disappearance of minority women from public and policy discussions of crisis and austerity, we question the possibility of using a ‘crisis framework’ to effectively identify, name and support minority women’s hardships of and grassroots resistances to crisis and austerity.

In this article we seek to explore the dynamics of gender, race, ethnicity and economic crisis by exploring how intersectionality can be combined with aspects of C. Wright Mills’ (1959) sociological imagination to create a new analytical tool for naming, understanding and legitimating minority women’s everyday experiences. By ‘intersectionality’ we mean ‘the study of the simultaneous and interacting effects of gender, race, class, sexual orientation, and national origin as categories of difference’ (Bassel and Emejulu 2010). For the purposes of this article, we seek to focus on Mills’ (1959: 14) private troubles/public issues
binary of his sociological imagination framework in which he defines ‘troubles [as occurring] within the character of the individual and within the immediate range of his [sic] relations with others...a trouble is a private matter’ and a public issue as ‘matters that transcend these local environments of the individual...[and] often involves a crisis in institutional arrangements’. In so doing, we wish to better understand the processes by which, on the whole, minority women’s persistent social and economic inequalities remain invisible due to their classification as ‘private troubles’ rather than ‘public issues’. We want to also explore how minority women’s precarity is further re-enforced under crisis by their location at particular intersections of race, gender, class and legal status, which are disparaged and disrespected (Hancock 2004). Combining the sociological imagination with intersectionality allows us to identify, name and take action on ‘routinised crises’—those persistent, institutionalised and ordinary hardships that many marginalised groups (and minority women in particular) experience in their everyday lives and how they are exacerbated, not invented, in acute periods. Stressing the importance of routinised crises may help us resist the temptation of disproportionately focusing on the exceptional crises of the economically privileged during these uncertain economic times (Strolovitch 2013).

We will begin this article with an overview of minority women’s political, social and economic positions before the crisis in France and the UK in order to make visible the routinised crises of this particular group. By ‘minority women’ we refer to women who experience the effects of processes of racialisation, class and gender domination as well as other sources of inequality, particularly hierarchies
of legal status. The term ‘minority women’ implies a process in which women at these intersections are ‘minoritised’ and, in turn, forge their own political identities and strategies drawing on the resources these social locations offer.

We will then turn to explore the 2008 economic crisis, the policy response of austerity, the particular impacts the crisis and austerity are having on minority women in France and the UK and explore what is actually ‘new’ here in terms of minority women’s precarity. Finally, we will conclude with a discussion about minority women and their advocates’ resistances to inequality and discuss the need for a new sociological imagination in order to take seriously minority women’s inequalities and activism.

**Whose ‘Crisis’ Counts?**

Even before the 2008 economic crisis, minority ethnic groups and minority women in particular in France and the UK were experiencing persistent economic and social hardships. Regardless of educational outcomes, minority groups are disproportionately more likely to be unemployed or underemployed (Emejulu 2008; Bassel 2012). For those minority women and men in the labour market, they must negotiate an ‘ethnic penalty’ which depresses wages and concentrates minority groups in low paid, temporary and unstable work (APPG 2013). Minority groups’ precarity in the labour market is due to a number of factors. Firstly and perhaps most importantly is the institutionalised racial and gender discrimination these women and men face which influences hiring, promotion, professional development, redundancy and firing. As has been well documented in the United Kingdom, job searching while black or brown, means minority candidates with similar or better qualifications than their white
counterparts are less likely to be interviewed, hired or secure equal pay
(Kamenou, Netto and Fearfull 2012). Additionally, minority groups, particularly
migrants, are less likely to have their overseas qualifications and professional
experience recognised in either the UK or France, thus hindering their labour
market participation from the outset.²

The economic and social impacts on minority groups, given these unequal labour
market experiences, are stark. In pre-crisis France, 21% of ‘descendants of
immigrants’ are poor, which is double the number of French people who have
French parents (Lombardo and Pujol 2008). Unfortunately, these French
economic figures are not disaggregated in order to capture variations between
different minority ethnic groups and ‘place of birth’ is otherwise used as a proxy
for ethnicity, which brings its own challenges.³ All minority groups are clustered
under the homogenised category of ‘immigrant origin’ which, in itself, reveals
and further entrenches minority groups’ unequal status through the non-
recognition of diversity and differences within and between these groups by the
French state.

In the UK, the poverty rate for minority groups is 40%, double the rate of the
white population (Palmer and Kenway 2007; Platt 2007). There are considerable
variations of poverty between minority ethnic groups with Bangladeshi,
Pakistani and Black African groups faring the worst (about 70% of Bangladeshi
children are growing up poor) and Indian and Black Caribbean groups faring

² On the challenges of this process for qualified migrants in France see Zikic (2010: 1404).
³ See Sabbagh (2008: 1231) on the debate over ‘statistiques ethniques’.
better (Indian groups in particular are more likely to be educated to degree level and be in professional employment). These differences in outcomes are attributable to a number of factors including the labour market participation of women, household size and composition and geographical location (Palmer and Kenway 2007). Whilst robust ethnic statistics are collected in the UK, they are oftentimes situated in parallel to gender statistics making ‘intersectional’ monitoring challenging (APPG 2012). As the All Party Parliamentary Group on Race and Community report notes, monitoring by ‘dual characteristics’ of gender and ethnicity is not required under the 2010 Equality Act or its guidance and is not addressed under the Equality and Human Rights Commission’s statutory code on employment (APPG 2012: 11). These data are also hard to access, unevenly collected and difficult for a layperson to comprehend. Initiatives like the Runnymede Trust ‘Race Equalities Scorecard’ attempt to improve access and action in relation to equality statistics.⁴

Twinned with these persistently economically hard times for minority groups are the construction of particular intersections of race, ethnicity and gender as ‘problematic’ in political and policy debates (Hancock 2004). Minority groups’ experiences do not prominently feature nor inform discussions of policy problems or solutions unless groups are interpellated in particularly racialised and gendered discussions of social problems (Phoenix and Phoenix 2012). For instance, the ‘public issue’ of minority unemployment oftentimes only features when linked to periods of urban unrest such as the 2005 Paris riots or the 2011 English riots. Minority groups’ persistent poverty and unemployment is typically

⁴ Please see: http://www.runnymedetrust.org/home/scorecard.html
only highlighted as a ‘public issue’ in the contexts of moral panics in each country about ‘failed’ state strategies, whether in relation to multiculturalist (UK) or assimilationist (France) policies. For example, in reaction to the 2011 English riots, Professor David Starkey opined on BBC2’s news and current affairs programme Newsnight that a ‘Jamaican patois’ had intruded upon English cities transforming these places into foreign territories (Phoenix and Phoenix 2012: 62). For Starkey, deviant ‘black culture’ is contagious and has been adopted by some white working class people who he refers to with the pejorative label of ‘chavs’ to argue ‘what has happened is that a substantial section of the chavs have become black. The whites have become black’ (Phoenix and Phoenix 2012: 100). As Phoenix and Phoenix argue, Starkey’s explanation is intersectional ‘bringing together racialisation, gender and (implicitly) social class’ (64) but always to pathologise blackness without addressing underlying social and economic and political causes—the public issues—of the riots (65). Thus routinised unemployment and poverty are defined as the private problem of the racialised poor and only become a public issue when the everyday social order is disrupted. For women in particular, the routinised crisis of poverty is privatised and is only defined as a public issue when their ‘failed femininities’ lead to family breakdown and public disorder (Allan and Taylor 17 January 2012)\(^5\). The ‘troubled mothers’ and ‘failing riot girls’ of the August 2011 riots in England embody the '[longstanding] condemnation of young working-class women but in a new context. The gendering of the riots tells us many things, but perhaps most importantly that classed and racialised distinctions and boundaries of failed and

ideal femininities are becoming more accentuated under the coalition government and its austerity policies’ (ibid: 17 January 2012).

The economic and social disparities that minority groups face are hardly new and we have not outlined anything particularly groundbreaking here for scholars of race and ethnicity. However, Dara Strolovitch (2013: 169-70) helpfully reminds us that ‘it is not inevitable that a bad thing will be defined and treated as bad, much less that it will be regarded as a crisis’. She goes on to argue that, minority groups, ‘are thus regarded...as the perpetuators of their own crises which are attributable to individual defects or cultural dysfunctions’. Thus what is important here to remember when we think about minority groups and the routinisation of their crises is that the very ordinariness of their experiences combined with the construction of some racial, ethnic and gender intersections as problematic serves to help to privatise the public issue of their persistent precarity. Lest that we attribute the privatisation of public issues as solely a problem for minority groups, it is important to note how the experiences of white working class men and boys, in particular the sharp declines in their educational and economic outcomes, are also classified as a private trouble of cultural dysfunction brought on by the (unsubstantiated claim of) intergenerational transmission of fecklessness, low aspirations and a lack of self-responsibility (Jones 2011; Tyler 2013; Shildrick et al 2013).

The challenge that confronts sociology is how to better foreground routinised crises when a focus on ‘exceptional crisis’ further marginalises these experiences. The way that this interface is obscured in public and policy debates
is sociologically significant and we explore later in this paper how intersectionality can help to build a new sociological imagination.

We will now turn to discuss the 2008 crisis and subsequent austerity measures and explore what is new in terms of the impact on minority women.

**The 2008 Economic Crisis, Austerity Measures and Minority Women**

The origins of the 2008 economic crisis can be traced back to the liberalisation of finance since the 1980s. The current crisis ‘derives from the long-term consequences of a cluster of financial innovations that aimed to separate credit decisions from their subsequent risks by splitting them into various components’ (Boyer 2012: 285). In other words, the creation of synthetic financial instruments—the now infamous credit default swaps and collateralised debt obligations—separated investors’ decision-making from their associated risks and this fuelled ‘a private credit-led speculative boom’ (ibid: 285) which ultimately proved unsustainable once the key manifestation of supposedly risk-free speculation—America’s subprime mortgage market—went into freefall.

What is important in our analysis of the effects of the economic crisis on minority women is the way in which the causes of the crisis and the range of possible policy responses to the crisis have been subsequently misrepresented by institutional actors and financial elites in both France and the UK.

The policies of austerity—deficit reduction through tax increases and cuts to public spending—are typically framed as the painful consequence of out-of-
control state spending rather than as the result of states rescuing irresponsible financial institutions. Consequently, austerity has been represented by institutional actors as the only viable economic policy in order to get states’ ‘fiscal houses in order’. As Clarke and Newman (2012: 300) argue, institutional actors and financial elites are undertaking ‘intense ideological work’ to reframe how the public thinks about the causes of the crisis and win the public’s ‘disaffected consent’ for deeply unpopular austerity policies. Part of this ideological work is the ‘magical thinking’ of instituting paradoxical austerity policies that have ‘contractionary effects’ on the economy (ibid: 302-3). By contractionary effects, they mean that by undertaking an unprecedented programme of cuts, this massive withdrawal of state spending will actually further shrink economic output rather than jumpstart economic growth and job creation. Indeed, that the International Monetary Fund (IMF), the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) and the European Council have all called for a rethink of austerity policies, given the shrinking economies and weak recoveries both inside and outside the Eurozone, appear to support these claims (Wearden 29/5/13).

The UK is undertaking an unprecedented and radical restructuring of its welfare state (Taylor-Gooby and Stoeker 2010; Yeates et al 2011). Cuts of £83bn are to be made over five years to public spending. In total, the Coalition’s fairly regressive tax increases (note the top rate of tax was reduced from 50% to 45%) and spending cuts are ‘larger than any retrenchment since the 1920s’ (Taylor-Gooby 2011: 4).
Whilst France is not implementing as stringent measures, a key policy aim is deficit reduction and cuts to public spending (Clift 2013). The headline of President François Hollande’s 2013 budget was a now abandoned commitment to cutting the deficit to 3% of GDP in 2013 (L’Express 2012; BBC 2013). The Socialist government has opted to side-step sweeping cuts and instead has chosen to freeze all government spending (which amounts to real cuts, due to inflation) and institute a disputed ‘supertax’ on the richest 15% of French households.

What does this context of austerity mean for the most marginalised groups, in particular minority women? Despite initial reports of a 'he-cession', women appear to be disproportionately impacted by the crisis (Women’s Budget Group 2010). They are more likely to be employed in the public sector (as teachers, nurses and social workers, etc), more likely to be sub-contracted to the state via private sector organizations (as care workers, cleaners, caterers, etc) and are also more likely to be connected to the local state (through accessing public services) because of gendered caring responsibilities (Seguino 2010; Taylor-Gooby and Stoeker 2010; Women’s Budget Group 2010; Theodoropoulou and Watt 2011; APPG 2012: 10). Therefore, austerity measures are likely to increase female unemployment whilst simultaneously reducing access to public services that might cushion against mass job losses. Recent reports on the impact of measures such as the Universal Credit and the Bedroom Tax in England, piloted in April 2013 in London boroughs where some of our research was conducted, indicate a disproportionate impact on women particularly survivors of domestic
violence. But which women are affected? And to what extent? Intersectional analyses must consider which women are being represented as affected by austerity and against whom a ‘politics of disgust’ (Hancock 2004) is ‘implicitly’ (Phoenix and Phoenix 2012) being mobilised. An ‘intersectional’ move is, therefore, urgently needed to challenge state representations of the crisis and the silencing of alternative analyses that demonstrate its differential and asymmetrical impacts (Bassel and Emejulu, under revision 2013).

We propose simultaneous considerations of processes of racialisation and hierarchies of legal status, ability and other processes of stratification which exist alongside and are inflected by gender inequalities (Bassel and Emejulu 2010) and are in turn, exacerbated by austerity measures. Thus a new ‘sociological imagination’ to analyse austerity is generated by naming what is old, what is new and which groups are privileged by having their crises recognised and legitimated as a public issue rather than a private trouble of individual failure and cultural dysfunction.

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7 For example, in the UK 20.5% of Pakistani and Bangladeshi women, and 17.7% of Black women are unemployed compared to 6.8% of white women (cited in APPG Report 2012: 4). In France, the unemployment rate of ‘immigrant women’ (defined by INSEE as ‘people born as foreigners outside of France and residing in France’) is higher than for non-immigrants, 17.5 % versus 9.7 % in 2010 (Duhamel and Joyeux 2013: 27-8).

8 In the UK, ‘given the high numbers of women from these [Black, Pakistani and Bangladeshi] groups working in the public sector, job cuts in this section of the workforce may have a disproportionate impact on Black, Pakistani and Bangladeshi women and inflate their overall unemployment figures’ (APPG 2012: 9).
**Anti-austerity politics at the intersections**

Given these tough, but not essentially ‘new’ economic times, how are minority women and their advocates in France and the UK responding? We have selected two examples from our empirical work—the changing context for civil society actors and the challenges to solidarity for those opposing austerity—which we think help to illustrate the importance of using a new sociological imagination in considering this moment in time and in relation to minority women’s routinised crises.

A recurring dilemma in our research relates to the reshaping of civil society over the last 25 years. We found that key civil society actors—third sector organisations—in each country have been adopting neoliberal principles and practices in order to secure their legitimacy and viability with institutional and funding actors. For instance, we found that many (but not all) third sector organisations were transforming themselves into ‘enterprising organisations’ by adopting the ethos, language and practices of the private sector in order to tap into new revenue streams and to demonstrate their ‘innovation’ and ‘business credentials’ in tackling social problems to institutional actors. As a policy officer

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9 The difficulty of defining this term is well documented in the literature (see, for example, Martens 2002; Vakil 1997). The plethora of terms used reflect this difficulty: ‘third sector’, ‘charities’, ‘voluntary sector’, ‘civil society organisations’, ‘community based organisations’, ‘associations’. We refer here to ‘formal (professionalized) independent societal organizations whose primary aim is to promote common goals at the national or the international level’ (Martens 2002: 280) as well as organisations oriented to the local and regional level. We include a normative element in both our definition and analysis: it is our position that these organisations have the potential to represent principles of mutuality, solidarity, independence from state and market (though this is not a necessary element of defining these organisations more broadly). As Aziz Choudry and Eric Shragge note, ‘NGOs operate in so many contexts and roles that it is difficult to generalize about them’ (2011: 506). Our sample selection is, therefore, informed by this definition but, in turn, enables us to refine a more context-specific understanding of the organisations we study.

10 We define enterprise as encompassing the values of ‘individualism, personal achievement…and the assumption of personal responsibility’ (Diochon and Anderson 2011: 96). Entrepreneurship is the independent actions of self-interested individuals for profit making activities (Anderson and Smith 2007). Enterprise and entrepreneurship are oftentimes used as synonyms for innovation, risk-taking and dynamism—the market-derived meanings for these terms have been obscured and these ideas are being promulgated with little thought about what is invoked (and what is silenced) in their use.
in Scotland stated:

> We’re shifting towards more enterprise-oriented activities rather than just grants...Grant funding isn’t the way the future’s going and self-generation of funding is important...It’s helped communities experiencing poverty set up their own enterprises and to get a toe-hold in the market system.

While this participant sees enterprise as the future for the third sector, others, however, are more conflicted about the neoliberal reshaping of the sector. As a French participant stated:

> It is our identity as an association [that is at stake]. If it is to become a business in the plans and work methods, isn’t it better for a business to take the job over? Or that one admits one is no longer an association? But for us...an organisation that has always been a force of critique, it is very complicated for us to position ourselves.

In our fieldwork in France since January 2013, several participants have expressed scepticism as to whether anything will, in fact, be different under a Socialist government and have claimed not be under any ‘illusions’.

Although this neoliberal colonisation of the third sector predates the economic downturn, the crisis and austerity measures appear to have further entrenched and legitimated these practices among some of these actors (Hall, Massey and Rustin 2013). What is important about this transformation of the third sector, we argue, is that it is shrinking the available spaces for contestation and oppositional politics—especially for minority women.

In Scotland we found that minority women activists are being recast by some

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11 The spread of an ‘enterprise culture’, however, is not identical across the three countries. Whilst the marketisation of the third sector is further advanced in Scotland and England, in France, this has been a slower process. The perception among participants that we have interviewed to date has been that enterprise ideas ostensibly arrived later than for ‘Les Anglais’ (the English). Yet market logic has without a doubt permeated French organisational practices (e.g. with the rise of strategies of shifting to temporary contracts for workers to reduce labour costs and provide a more flexible work force).
third sector organisations as ‘enterprising actors’, meaning that the activists’ critical analyses of their routinised crises and their grassroots activism are being reshaped and channeled into neoliberal work, in particular, the instituting of social enterprises such as community cafes and sewing groups. The embedding of neoliberal ideas—such principles as marketisation, commodification and competition—among activists in Scotland was justified using the language of empowerment in relation to the welfare state whereby:

A more of a level playing field [with the state is created]. It’s somebody commissioning a service and it’s somebody providing a service...The balance of power in that is always really interesting...They’re [minority women] more business partners than they are donor and recipient and that is an angle we would definitely like to try.

From our fieldwork it seems that oppositional work against routinised crises and the new crises generated by austerity appears to be very challenging in this context.

In France we found that those third sector organisations that wished to support minority women activists and be advocates on their behalf were severely restricted in their activities because of the bureaucratic and managerial rules of funding. These organisations are faced with a shrinking funding pool, increased competition from larger organisations and strict criteria making it difficult to organise and support actions that ‘cross’ categories—namely work with migrant women (versus migrants or women). Participants described the challenge of finding funding, either because of their intention to work with undocumented women who are excluded from some forms of European funding, or because their work is on a local rather than national scale which excludes them from
French funding streams that aim to include migrant women.

The shrinking spaces for dissent and collective action are made worse by the fact that mainstream migrant organisations in France have historically shunned integrating gender concerns, as evidenced by the difficulties faced in gaining support in the advocacy community for Gender Based Persecution as a grounds for refugee women’s asylum claims (Bassel 2012). In addition, changing funding regimes are influencing the militant action of third sector organisations in opposing immigration law and policy. The constraints identified in the previous section appear to ‘chill’ (Scott 2003) oppositional positioning to migration regimes for fear of losing funding. Our participants recounted the reformulation of alliances within existing coalitions such as the Coordination Française pour le Droit d’Asile (CFDA) [French Coordination for the Right to Asylum], a coalition of organisations that are critical of French asylum policy. Heavily state-funded organisations no longer participate in the CFDA and this has resulted in a tighter union of more financially independent and militant groups. As three participants pointed out, the CFDA is made up almost exclusively of organisations which have other funding sources than the state and who are not core service providers. In one participant’s view:

They [those agencies heavily dependent on state funds] are no longer in the CFDA because, well, now it is everyone for themselves and...they develop strategies to have good relations with the public authorities and have a maximum of the market. It is really obvious.

As the third sector is slowly co-opted by neoliberal processes, the sector, in turn, entrenches these neoliberal ideas and practices into its constituent groups. As the third sector increasingly resembles the private sector, the groups with whom
it works must be recast as clients, entrepreneurs and innovators but not necessarily *citizens* with particular political, social and economic rights. For minority women, this process of misrecognition is not ‘new’ but it does represent yet another challenge of naming and acting on their interests and concerns.

Given this changing landscape for minority women and the third sector, what impact does this have on building solidarity and coalitions across identities and interests in opposing austerity?

Firstly, as we have already argued, within third sector spaces in Scotland, England and France, the rise of an enterprise culture within these organisations does appear to be undermining the ability to build and maintain solidarity between different organisations and between different constituent groups due to increased competition for government contracts, increased staff workloads due to cuts in the core funding of organisations and the creeping hegemony of market principles in the ethos and practices of these agencies.

Secondly, we found that minority women themselves face real dilemmas in seeking to build solidarity across different interest groups. For the minority women we interviewed in Scotland, their neighbourhoods were perceived as hostile territories that undermine solidarity work because of the segregation and everyday racism they experience in their communities. In one focus group, the women were very doubtful they could form effective links with their white neighbours because of mutual suspicion. As one participant argued:
Ethnic minority groups are trying to drive in their humble way different causes, but how do you link with the local people, the indigenous people, it’s almost impossible... You don’t seem to find an avenue to join in when people are doing their thing, so you somehow find yourself on the sidelines all the time even if you did your thing, you won’t be able to attract them [the local white population] to come with you, it’s so segregated.

Because these women do not experience a real sense of 'community' in their neighbourhoods, because of the racism, hostility and isolation they experience, this stops them (and of course their white neighbours as well) from forming coalitions against austerity.12

In England and Scotland we also found that some participants did not feel it was possible to engage in political work when survival for themselves and their families was the priority. In a focus group we conducted for another project about austerity and minority groups (Sosenko et al 2013), a Somali man in Glasgow explained this trade-off:

The community are struggling to live, struggling to survive. Forget about politics, it is second hand, to be honest with you... And we said, what are doing about the politics? And when we look at each other and say, forget about the politics, we need to regenerate our communities first, before we go to the politics. So what we suggested is, we need to be included when the government is policy making, making political decisions, they have to always bear in mind the communities... who have no representation. Their voice has not been heard.

This raises the concern that those who are disproportionately affected by routinised crises and new crises brought on by austerity measures are also those who are the least able to respond. Thus the perspectives, analyses and

12 This finding was confirmed in our recent research (Sosenko et al 2013).
experiences of those at the intersection of race, gender and austerity are being effectively silenced from political and policy debates.

For those minority women activists we interviewed in England, questions were raised about how representative the anti-cuts movement – e.g. UK UnCut and the People’s Assembly against Austerity – is in terms of recognition in relation to the racialised and gendered effects of the crisis and austerity. For instance, one respondent in London suggested that race equality is not on the anti-cuts agenda and that there is no clear coalition or solidarity work taking place between race equality and anti-cuts movements. In spite of the pioneering work by disability activists within the anti-cuts movement, other intersectional work especially in relation to race and gender does not seem to feature. Another respondent in London questioned the inclusiveness of the anti-cuts movement for minority groups. In response to this lack of recognition, the organisation Black Activists Rising Against the Cuts (BARAC) was set up in order to provide mentorship and a safe environment for minority women activists.

These findings indicate real problems of building solidarity with and for minority women. With many third sector spaces compromised by a free market logic, with some communities effectively segregated and with a lack of representation in many anti-austerity coalitions, the spaces and opportunities for minority women to collectively analyse and take action on the old and new intersectional inequalities that they experience appear to be at best shrinking or at worst non-existent. Without these public spaces for dissent and activism, the perspectives and experiences of minority women have been and continue to be defined as
private troubles. Without a commitment to intersectionality and a recognition of the public issue of minority women’s routinised inequalities, minority women will continue to be ignored and their experiences deemed ordinary, acceptable and beyond the scope of politics and policy.

**Conclusions**

Intersectionality can renew the sociological imagination to identify the differential effects of austerity measures on various social groups whilst also supporting new examinations of and oppositions to neoliberal hegemony (Bassel and Emejulu, under revision 2013). Analyses of intersectionality and neoliberalism must be combined in order to capture the paradoxical politics currently at play. We have demonstrated this renewal by naming what is old, what is new and whose crisis counts as a public issue worthy of policy action.

In this deeply troubling context, who will lobby with and for minority women in the diminishing political field? The dynamics we have identified may preclude the bridging and expansion of social justice agendas that is essential to addressing the challenges of austerity. Yet new political projects can also be inspired through the lens of intersectional contestations (Yuval-Davis 2012) that can engender ‘deep political solidarity’ (Hancock 2011). This work should, therefore, be read as a call to arms for a vigorous intersectional critique of crisis and austerity in order to understand its asymmetrical impacts and renew the sociological imagination.
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