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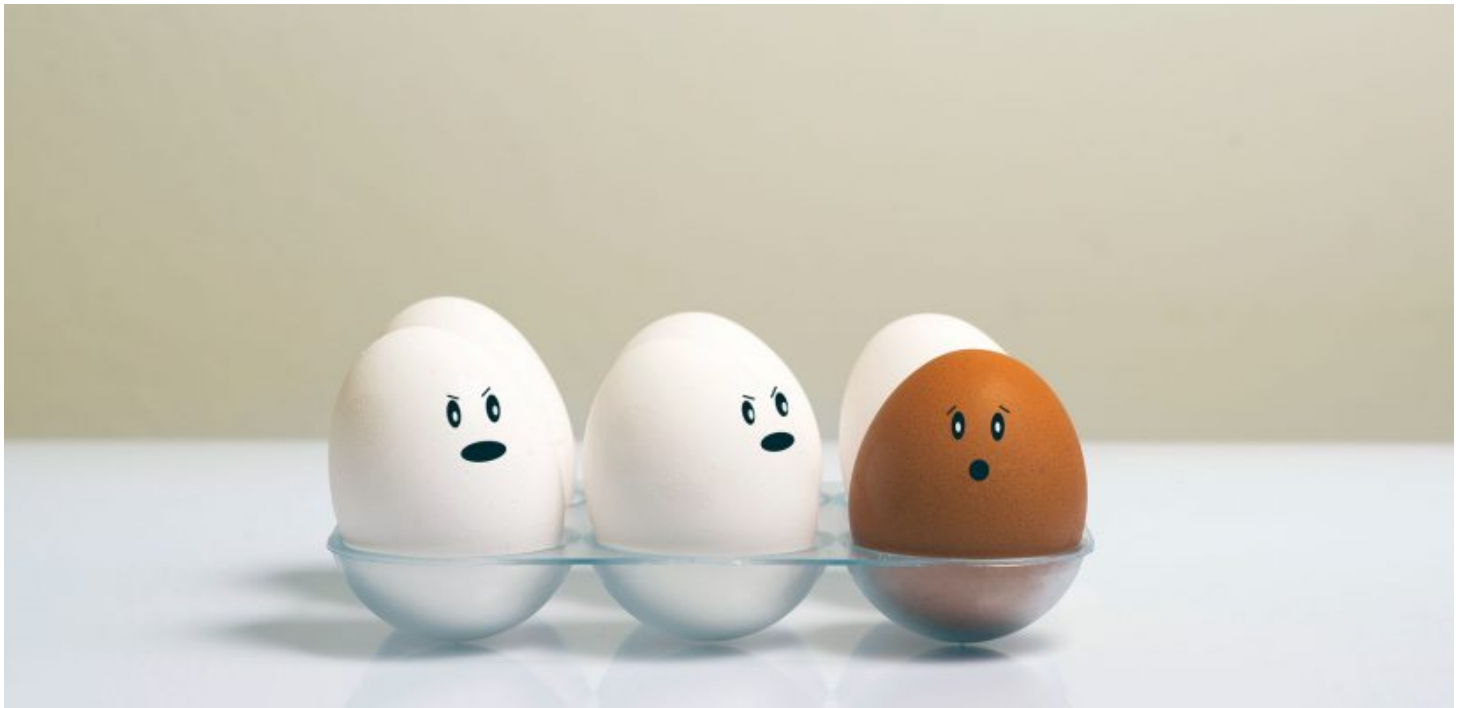
Differences empowering solidarity

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“Without community there is no liberation .. but community must not mean a shedding of our differences, nor the pathetic pretence that these differences do not exist”

(Audre Lorde)

During this period of extended and repeated lockdowns, people around the world have rediscovered the importance of local community networks. Indeed, whilst major governments have at times stumbled, ignored or failed to quickly respond to the Covid pandemic threat, small-scale organised action groups have brought people together and enabled them to form localised networks to survive isolation, restrictions in movement and financial troubles together. Indeed, grass roots political organising groups have for long known the power of community in building solidarity and inducing change.

At the same time, exclusionary behaviour towards specific people is sometimes deliberately overlooked in the name of the “greater good”. For example, the specificities of the problem relating to Black trans lives were for a time ignored, with instead a firm focus on Black liberation. We wanted to challenge and change this, suggesting that differences do not necessarily have to divide communities and groups, but can instead empower and build solidarity within.

Being associated with the University of Westminster, the call for proposals for events highlighting work done on prejudice and discrimination and the university’s commitment to the Black Lives Matter movement provided the perfect platform to include those deliberately excluded. Together we conceptualised “Difference as Empowering Solidarities: A Workshop on Organising Politics “, an event at the [Difference Festival 2021](https://blog.westminster.ac.uk/difference/difference-festival/) (<https://blog.westminster.ac.uk/difference/difference-festival/>) that aimed to build a process through which inclusive communities could be formed within organising circles.

The building of solidarity, unfortunately, often leads to an absence of introspection – with no space to discuss loneliness, pain, and to speak about those who have been at the receiving end of violence at the hands of social justice defenders themselves. No neat categories of the oppressor and oppressed, unfortunately, exist at the moment. While a brown woman might face racialised gender oppression in the UK, her upper caste privilege makes her the oppressor in the context of India and its diasporic communities. Acknowledging and taking responsibility leads to accountability in organising work, while also keeping with intersectional feminist principles to actively create space for those who do not share the same privileges.

We need spaces within our organising circles collectively reflect upon learning from our experiences. It is also important to keep focus on those who have been minoritised, and to build a solidarity that is multi-layered. Let us illustrate it with another example – there are two individuals: A) a white gay-man and B) a brown cis-man. Both of them are united in their fight against racism, where they are both strong allies. This is solidarity. Additionally, B also recognises his heteronormative privileges and joins in with A to oppose any anti-LGBTQ+ policies. Hence, what we observe is the formation of multi-layered solidarity – the kind of solidarity that is generous, empathetic, affirmative, determined, and constantly evolving. All of this might seem like a lot to deal with especially while we have urgent crises of discrimination, authoritarian governments, systematic injustices looming upon us.

During the workshop we wanted to explore the possibility of being able to grow with these conversations. The processes of centring minoritised groups in our conversations and organising circles are not separated from these major issues. Instead, they lead to an intersectional understanding and collective organising. Our aim was to envision building radical communities of care in our organising circles. We began by setting up some basic ground rules that were accepted by all the participants. The ground rules were reworked after every activity, thus solidifying the idea that we need to change our points of view as we get new information. In the subsequent sessions of remaking and rethinking the ground rules, participants started reflecting on what it means to be