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AGAINST RACISM

Adrián Scribano (Eds.)

David Altheide – Massimo Cerulo – Maximiliano Korstanje. –
Fabio La Rocca – Paulo Henrique Martins – Desirée Poets –
Jaime Preciado Coronado – Adrián Scribano –
Geoffrey Skoll – Fred Evans

Vida Cotidiana, espacio-temporalidad y Sensibilidades Sociales

Centro de Investigaciones y Estudios Sociológicos

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Director del CIES:

Adrián Scribano

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Claudia Gandía

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Centro de Investigaciones y Estudios Sociológicos

editorial@estudiossociologicos.org – www.estudiossociologicos.org

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Documentos de Trabajo del CIES

Documentos de Trabajo del CIES es una publicación electrónica del Centro de Investigaciones y Estudios Sociológicos, donde las y los investigadores del ámbito de las Ciencias Sociales tienen la oportunidad de socializar los avances relativos a sus investigaciones como así también las actividades académicas y científicas en las que participan difundiendo su labor.

Es la intención al generar este espacio que, quienes estamos abocados a la tarea de construir conocimiento científico desde el Sur, nos encontremos en él para escribir acerca de las indagaciones realizadas en el marco de las indagaciones individuales y colectivas vinculados a los campos temáticos propios de las áreas que convocan:

Ambiente y Sociedad, Vida Cotidiana, Espacio-temporalidad y Sensibilidades Sociales, Conflicto y Estructura Social e Innovaciones Metodológicas.

Constituye esta otra oportunidad para dejar constancia del interés -compartido por muchas y muchos-, y del convencimiento que una de nuestras tareas es la de difundir las voces de quienes tienen mucho que decir sobre las realidades sociales, ambientales, cotidianas y sobre los modos de abordarlas científicamente.

En este sentido los objetivos de esta publicación recuperan las intenciones del CIES de dialogar e indagar sobre la sociedad desde caminos interdisciplinarios vinculados a la Teoría Social y a formas de indagación concretas.

Particularmente la creación de este espacio se realiza con el propósito de dar a conocer los proyectos y líneas de trabajo a la comunidad científica, académica e interesados en las temáticas en estudio que se desarrollan en dicho Centro.

Centro de Investigaciones y Estudios Sociológicos

Las múltiples y complejas transformaciones que se están evidenciando en el inicio de la segunda década del siglo XXI en Latinoamérica, el Sur global y el mundo se presentan a todos los científicos sociales como una fuente de desafíos y preguntas. Por ello, el Centro de Investigaciones y Estudios Sociológicos (Asociación Civil – Leg. 1842624) es un espacio que se propone compartir, dialogar e indagar la sociedad -más allá de la adjetivación desde la sociología- desde caminos interdisciplinarios que giran alrededor de la Teoría Social y las prácticas de indagación concretas.

Presentation
AGAINST RACISM

Adrián Scribano

Director of the Centre for Sociological Research and Studies (CIES) and Principal Researcher at the National Council for Scientific and Technical Research (CONICET) of Argentina.

In the context of the COVID-19 pandemic, a disastrous event occurred in the United States, the death of George Floyd, the brutal murder of George Floyd. This event provoked numerous reactions of outrage, sadness, rejection and moral fatigue. Thousands of people throughout the United States, in Europe, in Latin America and across the rest of the world, demonstrated against racism in the context of the most widespread pandemic of recent centuries. Hundreds of thousands of people sensitized themselves, once again so far this century, to the "programmed" excesses of a capitalism that can only respond with death.

In this framework, a group of friends and colleagues decided to deliver some words as untimely reflections on what happened, on its significance, on its meaning in context.

The Center for Research and Sociological Studies proposed to prepare this Working Document which I am now pleased to present. Beyond stylistic refinement and editorial care, what is presented here are reflections of academics from three continents on what happened. Continuing the critical "dictum" of all the social sciences, the works presented here, brief but incisive, are the testimony of how multiple views and the diverse ways of seeing the world are necessary to elaborate a common criticism of all kinds of injustice and all kinds of inequality.

Again, as in at least the past 500 years, racialization has been the reason why hundreds of thousands of people have taken to the streets, taking the initiative to clearly state that what must be done once and for all is to: let the people breathe. Because precisely where the breath begins, the voice is born, and the word is found as a community gesture of hope.

I want to deeply thank all my friends and colleagues who have participated in this Working Document for the speed and seriousness with which they have worked. I am extremely grateful to Maximiliano Korstanje and Majid Yar for their support with the collection, to Juan Ferreras for his support with the layout of the document and its publication, and I also want to thank all the people who in one way or another have supported us in writing this, because the social sciences do not exist without human beings, without all that groups of human beings configure the as the collective practices that give rise to that which today we call social sciences.

Demonstrations, performances, protests, participation in social networks of thousands of people appealing to repudiation, indignation and sadness, but also to community, collective and hope invite us to remember the words of someone else murdered in the US in the last century:

“Power properly understood is nothing but the ability to achieve purpose. It is the strength required to bring about social, political, and economic change. . . And one of the great problems of history is that the concepts of love and power have usually been contrasted as opposites – polar opposites – so that love is identified with the resignation of power, and power with the denial of love. Now we’ve got to get this thing right. What [we need to realize is] that power without love is reckless and abusive, and love without power is sentimental and anemic. . . It is precisely this collision of immoral power with powerless morality which constitutes the major crisis of our time.”

Martin Luther King Jr.

Marketing Fear as Safety and Entertainment

David L. Altheide

Arizona State University, US. Regents' Professor Emeritus

The brutal execution of George Floyd by members of the Minneapolis police department is the latest in a series of brutal murders by police officers in the United States. The police abuses are not only due to bad individual police officers, but they also reflect a deep police culture that supports excessive force, on the one hand, and seethe with racism, on the other hand. Indeed, we continue to receive reports of brutal and arbitrary police actions against people demonstrating against the murder of George Floyd. There is another crucial consideration: Police operate in many instances with impunity, meaning that they often have had the support of their superiors and unions, and—very significantly—violent enforcement actions, as well as massive incarceration of minority group members. These actions are, for the most part supported by many frightened and uninformed Americans, including local, state, and national political leaders. President Trump is touting “law and order” to justify many of these actions, including his own use of National Guard troops to remove lawful and peaceful protesters outside the White House. In general, this support is based on unfounded and pervasive fear. And President Trump’s supporters have widely succumbed to the propaganda of fear.

Fear is a hot commodity in American life. It is popular and entertaining, and that is the main reason why sensational fear-ridden reports about crime, danger, terrorism and immigrant threats abound in news reports. This also makes people angry, but most [anger is based on fear](#). Fear resonates through many American issues and policies, whether in politics, criminal justice, immigration, gun control, or health. My research shows that the [politics of fear](#) is pervasive, and it [travels from one topic and context to another](#). Eighty years ago, on Halloween night, many citizens panicked as they listened to Orson Welles radio broadcast, “War of the Worlds,” about an invasion from Mars. Social psychologist Hadley Cantril pointed out that reports about Europe preparing for war were part of the context of susceptibility. Skip ahead to 2004 when George W. Bush used the words terrorism/terrorist 16 times in his acceptance speech—without mentioning immigrants. Sixteen years later, Donald Trump’s error-laden [State of the Union address](#) to the country on February 4, 2020 referred to immigrants 6 times, but nothing about terrorism even though just weeks prior to that he insisted that there were Middle Eastern terrorists and gang members among the toddlers heading to our border. Both presidents demonstrated that the propaganda of fear is powerful because it plays to deep-seated emotions about threat and insecurity. The

discourse of fear strikes a responsive chord among followers tuned to a demagogue's dark rhetoric that bypasses the light of evidence.

Fear is marketed as entertainment to increase TV ratings, even though it can have horrendous political consequences. TV network programmers know that fear strikes an emotional chord and gets our attention. This involves media as well as advertising and products to keep us safe. Decades of sensationalized and distorted news reports about crime and drug use, particularly among minority groups, contributed to widespread misinformation and fear among Americans that led to draconian federal and state criminal sentencing guidelines that were decried by social scientists but praised by politicians of all political stripes. Whether New York's "[stop and frisk](#)" policies that targeted minority group men, "[three strikes](#)" mandatory life-term sentencing, or harsher penalties for "[crack cocaine](#)" (as opposed to "powder"), the aim was to protect the frightened public. Several of these punitive policies that expanded our prison population at a cost of billions of dollars, and devastated minority communities have now been rescinded and even apologized for, but the devastating results remain.

Fear adds to our deteriorating, but entertaining, political situation. Mr. Trump is President partly because he is entertaining and told many lies about minority group crime. A legacy of fear is part of our recent history. Democrats and Republicans alike have played to fear over the last 30 years. My research on TV news shows that the promotion of the politics of fear is a byproduct of entertaining and sensationalized reports to build audience ratings. Repetition of a source of fear, such as crime, sensitizes audiences to risk, even if they are not likely to be a victim. Soon, audiences believe that they are potential victims, which induces more fear and makes them susceptible to emotional appeals to be protected from the various sources of fear.

Fear was expanded with the 9/11 attacks against any group or country that was labeled "terrorist." President George W. Bush's campaign for reelection included thousands of appeals to protect us from terrorism. President Obama used fear to justify expanding drone attacks against suspected terrorists, and Donald Trump took the [politics of fear](#) to a new level by promoting the fear of immigrants, especially Mexicans, while demonizing Muslims. Many fearful American citizens voted their approval for the uncivil discourse and policies that contributed to an increase in hateful attacks on Mexican Americans, Jews, Muslims, minority groups, and caging immigrant children.

Another example is the Trump administration policy to harass immigrants seeking amnesty. The administration directed border agents to remove children from parents, and more recently, force all amnesty seekers to stay for months in Mexico until their perfunctory amnesty appeals can be heard. Attorney General Jeff Sessions' guidelines--and other officials who have followed him-- for granting asylum to immigrants is a gross injustice that is not supported by facts. He stated that "...claims by aliens

pertaining to domestic violence or gang violence perpetrated by non-governmental actors will not qualify for asylum.” Mr. Sessions drew on sensationalized and false fear of immigrants, who have been pilloried by Donald Trump (as criminals, rapists, and drug dealers), to deny them asylum as they flee very real fears of being murdered by spouses, organized crime, and criminal gangs. It is unfortunate, illogical, and embarrassing that such fake fears are guiding our immigration policy and contributing to the suffering of thousands of women and children seeking refuge.

Many critics have pointed out the Trump agenda for promoting fear, but even they sometimes miss the larger issue. Virginia Heffernan’s insights about the blind loyalty of many Trump followers underestimates the political impact of fear (LAT, Jan. 10, 2020: “Trumpism Deserves to be Called a Cult”). I agree with Ms. Heffernan’s comment: “We need to stay focused on how so many Americans came to this pass and took this destructive course.” Republicans are more wary than others of exaggerated fears presented by entertainment media. My research and that of other colleagues and journalists shows that Republican supporters, compared to Independents and Democrats, view the world as more dangerous, unpredictable, and are more fearful of “outsiders”—immigrants, ethnic groups, Muslims. They are also more fearful of terrorism, crime, and threats to the “American way of life.” These perceptions and beliefs attract many to the politics of fear that Donald Trump promotes, including the promises to keep them safe from numerous threats, while crafting their support of draconian domestic and foreign policies. The 2020 presidential election season promises to see more appeals to fear. Hopefully, a more aware electorate will reject the propaganda of fear and its racist consequences.

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**From COVID-19 to the thesis of The Undesired Guest:
reflections on George Floyd’s killing**

Maximiliano E. Korstanje.

University of Palermo, Argentina

CERS, Centre for Ethnicity and Racism Studies, University of Leeds, UK.

A new virus outbreak originated in the Chinese city of Wuhan, which is known popularly as COVID-19 (CO-SARsV2), tittered the underdeveloped as well as developed nations on the brink of collapse, affecting not only the global commerce but also paralyzing the capitalist world. The virus, which originally spread at the end of 2019, was rapidly disseminated to the rest of the world in weeks. To the date, on May 30 of 2020, the virus caused more than 368.800 deceases and infected 6.000.000 persons, an ever-increasing cipher. Those countries that have made the greatest victims are the United States (105.231), followed by The United Kingdom (38.376), Italy (33.341), Brazil (28.015) and Spain (27.125) only to name a few. The industrialized nations faced one of the severest economic downturns in their history. No matter than appalling effects this new virus caused in the global North, COVID-19 accelerated a crisis of sense in the Capitalist world which was originally engulfed after 9/11 and the declaration of War on Terror (Bush’s administration). The Non-Western “Other” is now an undesired guest who needs to be controlled and tightly scrutinized. Undoubtely this marks the end of hospitality as least as we know it.

In his seminal book, *Of Hospitality*, Jacques Derrida (2000) elaborates a more than interesting question revolving around hospitality. The guest is invited always whether they can credit its identity or pay for it (conditioned hospitality). In so doing, hosts are subordinated to the guest who often shakes “the reign of dogmatism”. Derrida reminds that hostility and hospitality share the same etymological origins: *hospitium*. When the borders of hosting society are vulnerated, as Derrida holds, hostility restores the order.

As the previous backdrop is given, at the end of May (amid the pandemic), George Floyd, an afro-descendant worker (46 years old) who lived in Minneapolis, US, is pressed in his neck by a Police’s knee (Derek Chauvin) for more than 7 minutes. Floyd dies because mechanical asphyxia, in a great medical controversy opened even today. Quite aside from this, Floyd’s assassination reveals two important things. On one hand, the racism and xenophobia of some security force members, while on another, the cultural asymmetries between first and second class citizens in the US.

Is George Floyd an undesired “Other”?

David Altheide brilliantly argues that the United States historically debated revolving around two distinct but powerful fears, the fear of strangers and the fear of tyranny. As a form of entertainment, the culture of fear gradually cultivated an uncanny paternalism for the “Non-Western Other” who was an object of curiosity and hostility. Having said this, Altheide argues convincingly that the triumph of Donald Trump who accessed to the US presidency, evidently showed not only how the psychological fear can be packaged and commoditized to impose an ideological (racist) message, but the rise of long-dormant discourses oriented to xenophobia and radicalization (Altheide 2006; 2009; 2020). Complementarily, Professor Geoffrey Skoll alludes to this process as “the globalization of fear”, which epitomizes the global expansion of the US worldwide, while Luke Howie coins the term “witnesses to terror”. For Skoll (2016), terrorism offers a fertile ground in order for capital-owners to affirm the workers’ exploitation, whereas the material forces of capitalism are expanded to other nations. Is COVID-19 a continuation of the War on Terror?

In this short piece I hold the thesis that far from being a foundational event, the outbreak and expansion of COVID-19 strengthen a radicalized anti-foreign sentiment associated with the end of hospitality as above noted.

The idea of a war against terrorism mutates towards a war against a virus, an invisible killer which supposedly decimates entire population. Beyond the rhetoric of this discourse, now all we are the terrorists who need to be physically isolated as potential dangers to the public health. As potential (silent) carriers, lay-citizens are seen as potential killers –who like terrorists- need to be detected and immobilized (by the infectology). Here two assumptions should be made. Anthropologically speaking, being infected marks a border, a frontier between the health and the sickness. In this liminoid state, infected people are disciplined –and scrutinized- to be incorporated into society once recovered. Not surprisingly, authorities in post-COVID-19 contexts, appear accompanied by well-known experts reminding the infected, deaths and recovered patients. As an exorcising rite of passage, the audience waits for what is coming and so to speak, believes what is coming is probably even worse. In such a process, the medical reason plays a crucial role in detecting, controlling the infected people. Science governs from a hypothetical future explaining, framing and imagining risks never make room in reality. The curve of COVID-19 is desired, dreamed, imagined and even feared, but nobody has accurate information –like the case of terrorist attacks- on what it will happen. The medical discourse not only governs through the lens of future risks, but it is exclusively based on the urgency of extirpation to keep the patient’s stability. Likewise, let’s me reminds how the medical reason intervenes in the case of Cancer. When the body is in risk, because invasive cancer, doctors employ different techniques ranging from drugs to *chemotherapy*. When everything

fails, no less true is that the extirpation of the affected organ situates as the only solution. This Western metaphor serves to understand the interconnection of medical reason, the risk and lockdown. These remarks very well coincide with counter-terrorism measures, some states impose unilateral steps and protocols to ghettoize Muslim neighborhood in Europe and the US during the investigation takes place. To some extent, medical reasoning and Thana-capitalism are inextricably intertwined (Korstanje 2016).

Last but not least, COVID-19 gives us an invitation to new normality where the foreigner who in other epochs were venerated as an agent of economic prosperity and a civilized lifestyle, becomes in an “undesired guest”. *The end of hospitality* results from the triumph of terrorism in mining the West from inside, creating a climate of political instability and fear which affects the democratic checks and balance institutions.

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The murder of George Floyd and collective negative emotions

Massimo Cerulo

University of Perugia (IT) - CERLIS, Paris Descartes (FR)

The brutal murder of George Floyd by a policeman generated a hurricane of negative emotions in almost everyone who watched the cruel video. From the day following the event, hundreds of thousands of Americans went to the streets to demonstrate against police violence and to honour Floyd's memory. In sociological terms, it is a series of collective emotional manifestations, in which social action is shared with others and “shown off”. However, as the sociology of emotions proves, in cases of collective emotional actions, the situation quickly changes. So, as the days passed, from the first peaceful demonstrations based on the request for justice and the recognition of rights for people subject to racism, there was a move to violent actions, clashes with the police, threats from the central state to use first the National Guard and then the army. The racial motives linked to the barbaric murder of George Floyd, therefore, have hybridized with multiple claims.

The social situation, day after day, has become explosive and extraordinary and revealed itself to be cyclic: on the one hand, it has unprecedented characteristics in its development, due to forms of raids and violence, the latter also by policemen. On the other hand, however, there is the return in these forms of collective social action of a traditional American trait that has appeared several times in history: the Americans, when they experience a deep malaise - generated by the most varied of causes - tend to manifest negative emotions through violent collective-public actions. They tend to go to the streets and demonstrate. That said, it should be remembered that the killing of Floyd took place in Minneapolis, Minnesota. What does this mean in historical and social terms? First of all, we find ourselves in a "sentimental" territorial environment: we are in the American Midwest, that is, in the most Germanic part of the country, the heartland of the nation. American history teaches that from this part of country, very often, emotions spread to the whole community. What happens in those areas reverberates and amplifies in the rest of the nation, because it touches the soul of the country. Again: Minnesota reminds us that Americans have deep Germanic roots and Trump is there to represent it (and it is no coincidence that the mayor of the city and the governor of the state have a German surname): he rides this generalized sentiment to reinforce his "macho" narrative.

Today, June 6, 2020, the racial fuse of the demonstrations seems to have dissolved and hybridized with other reasons that have increased the violence of collective actions. This happened because historically, as already noted, Americans have shown a tendency to react to forms of malaise with

violence, perhaps because they consider themselves to be the hegemonic country of the planet (and it is difficult to be hegemonic without being belligerent). Not to forget that, moreover, millions of Americans are armed so they have a sort of “familiarity” with violence. However, precisely because of the iridescent nature of these demonstrations, it becomes complex to establish exactly what is happening and where the protest is going, because it is a matter of collective actions and emotional outbursts, which have lost the racial matrix of the first hours. Of course, this is not just an African-American protest, because the latter represent only 12% of the population of the United States and therefore do not even have the strength to keep the country in check for over a week. There is much more than that, namely the global pandemic due to COVID-19 and its consequences in the United States: the country is economically torn by the virus, with almost 40 million unemployed people without social networks - because very often, if you lose your job in the US, you literally end up on the street - and a strong malaise that is transferred to the street through an explosion of negative emotions that translates into violent behaviour.

What is going to happen in the next few days? On average, these protests in the US tend to vanish by wearing down, even without direct intervention by the central State. Clearly it will depend on when and how this occurs. However, in reference to the presidential elections in November - still very far away - the narratives of the violence and demonstrations that the media will decide to adopt in the coming weeks will count. So far, President Trump has called protesters "scum" by addressing Andrew Cuomo, governor of New York State, saying the "scum that occurs in New York" is his fault. Therefore, Trump's narrative is that the protesters are on the same level as fools and hence he will take care of restoring law and order, through the use of the military if necessary. In this sense, it should be remembered that most US public opinion does not appreciate such violent collective behaviour or indeed violence as such. So, the public opinion that historically feeds on a high level of social discipline demands that the situation normalizes itself, that the negative emotions so far expressed by the participants find other channels.

In conclusion, we have therefore recalled how, on average, these collective emotional behaviours disappear by wearing down. However, history has shown how, at times, the American empire gives space to such forms of violent collective demonstration through a transfer beyond national borders, by "getting into" a war. Let's think of the 9/11 crisis and the immediate Iraq war that followed. At the moment, however, this possibility is not visible on the horizon. Therefore, the negative charge of such forms of collective demonstrations will have to find different ways to dissipate.

United we (can) stand

Fabio La Rocca

LERSEM-IRSA - University Paul-Valéry Montpellier 3

The world is totally in panic with the virus of racism that strikes again! In the current situation, we can look at the mass of people around the world from Minneapolis to Los Angeles, from Paris to Rome, from Bristol to Berlin, from Budapest to Rio de Janeiro, as a sign of a unity, but also as a *ras de bol* against a system where inequality is growing. The streets of the cities became a scenario of a global fight to revendicate not only a necessary justice, but a “new world”. A world where, we hope, Georges Floyd represents a symbol of a possible change. A change of mentality, this is a special problem! The mentality of a supremacy of a system generating hate, hatred, where a simple power (such as that of a policeman, for example) can engender the legitimacy to dominate the “other” with violence, arrogance, brutality, oppression.

The force of human being is the ritual of staying and living together, and the images of the streets all around the world must be read as the sign of a tide against ignorance and arrogance. The brutality against black people starts from the shame of slavery and has generated a chain across the epochs where we see the same images. It seems to be like a frozen image! But we must pay attention to these images and not just consume them! We know that one of the importance features of images is that they contribute to building memory, and they are symbols and signs of the times. And we must not forget that memory, on the contrary, serves to re-build a new ethics because images have the possibility to contribute to changing history, but only if they enter the awareness of the people, and we look at them with intensity and let them come inside deeply, incorporate them as an opportunity to help raise consciousness and better sensitize each person’s awareness of particular social issues.

In this perspective, education plays a crucial role in improving forms of respect and unity; and the wave of global movement in protest against the policy of violence, represents a support for the black community, using all the possible instruments to try to getting their voices heard. Racism is a product of ignorance and this has no borders, and we can see how various Presidents of some nations can nourish such ignorance and stupidity with their words or with a tweet. This also generates a nebulous form of violence and racism. And it’s not a surprise if some protests actually try to “decapitate” the statues of some controversial men of history who in the past were part of the commerce of slavery. This represents a symbolic means by which the massive protests make clear their opposition to all forms of racism, and this sentiment becomes a shared sensibility of the people by the means of digital interaction. In fact,

digital interaction via the web is a way to show and organize dissension, and to touch a large number of people who can participate through their presence online and create empathy. Indeed, the origin of *Black Lives Matter* came from the web, a hashtag used on a social network by three black activists (Alicia Garza, Patrisse Khan-Cullors, and Opal Tometi), and became a veritable social protest movement with the organization of many manifestations in the streets of US where we can see, for example, the tactic of the “die-in”. *Black Lives Matter* is the cry of the people’s anger against injustice, the discrimination that black people endure, and this is a way to create a large assembly, a unity of all kind of races that can shout together, creating a big resonance thanks to the fact that the web has become a place of denunciation and mobilization. From the web to the street and vice-versa, all the slogans circulate with the intention to sensitize the spirit of human beings, and also all the videos and pictures of police crimes serve to denounce this brutality. Instagram, Twitter, Facebook are like an echo chamber creating a social empathy, a way to fight. “Fight the Power” as said the rap of Public Enemy (a track made for Spike Lee’s movie *Do the Right Thing*), a call that we can considerate as an anthem of the streets. A street that reclaims rights, that offers a manner to unify the people, removing all the borders created by ignorance and the blind power that creates racism, brutality, and injustice. And the cry *I can’t breathe*, that we associate with the *Black Lives Matter* movement, originally derived from the death of Eric Garner in 2014, is again taken-up by people after the terrible images of the brutality against George Floyd that all of us watched as spectators of a crime. This cry, adopted like a chant, embodies the protest and is a way to bring people together, and also a hope of a potential change, and demonstrates that such movements are an important part of our life. We can breathe together: and this appears a willingness to stay united against discrimination because only united *we shall overcome!*

Black Lives Matter, Everywhere, Right Here, Right Now – From the Americas to Palestine*Desirée Poets*

Assistant Professor of Postcolonial Theory - Department of Political Science (PSCI)

Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University (VirginiaTech)

Not everything changed under the Covid-19 crisis. The pandemic, in reaching globally, simultaneously exposed the racialized and spatial organization of vulnerability,¹ disproportionately affecting impoverished black, brown, and Native American/Indigenous communities throughout the Americas. In Brazil, favela communities, marked by government neglect when it comes to public services and by the hyper-presence of the state's punitive and military apparatus, responded to Covid-19 by mobilizing networks of care to protect residents' lives. This life-affirming work, however, has been interrupted by police operations in favelas. Indeed, in April 2020, police killings in Rio went up by 43% as compared to the same time last year.² In May, they cost the life of 14-year old João Pedro Matos Pinto. The following month, 5-year old Miguel Otávio died in Recife while accompanying his mother, a domestic worker, to her workplace. He fell from the 9th story of the luxury high-rise while his mother walked her employer's dog and her boss was supposed to watch Miguel. In the words of Kanien'kehá:ka Mohawk scholar Audra Simpson, "states do not always have to kill, its citizen can do that for it."³

In the US, anti-black violence and police brutality took the lives of Ahmaud Arbery, Breonna Taylor, Sean Reed, Tony McDade, and George Floyd. These names, in the US and in Brazil, are the most recent from the archive: Travyon Martin, Amarildo Dias de Souza, Eric Garner, Cláudia Silva Ferreira, Ayianna Stanley-Jones, Marielle Franco, and others. 'And others' indicates that the numbers are 'countless'. In listing their names, we interrupt their forgetting as yet another victim of structural violence. Statistics, in counting them, have namely also left their deaths "un/accounted for."⁴ But the current moment is about more than recounting black death.

The protests and movements that have (re-)erupted are calling for police and prison divestment and for investments in care, housing, education, and community self-governance.⁵ They are also

¹ Freshour, Carrie and Brian Williams (2020), "Abolition in the time of Covid-19". *Antipode Online*. Available at <https://antipodeonline.org/2020/04/09/abolition-in-the-time-of-covid-19/> [accessed June 6, 2020].

² Barbon, Júlia (2020), "Mortes por policiais crescem 43% no RJ durante quarentena, na contramão de crimes". *Folha de São Paulo* [online], May 26, 2020. Available at <https://www1.folha.uol.com.br/cotidiano/2020/05/mortes-por-policiais-crescem-43-no-rj-durante-quarentena-na-contramao-de-crimes.shtml> [accessed June 6, 2020].

³ Simpson, Audra (2016), "The State is a Man: Theresa Spence, Loretta Saunders and the Gender of Settler Sovereignty" in *Theory & Event* 19 (4).

⁴ Sharpe, Christina (2016). *In the wake: On blackness and being*. Durham: Duke University Press.

⁵ See #8toAbolition website: <https://www.8toabolition.com/> [accessed June 9, 2020].

organizing practices towards precisely these goals, such as in housing, community defense, and healing. The protests are not just against the existing systems of oppression; they pivot us towards abolitionist futures. Abolitionism is namely not just the destruction of the old – such as of punitive institutions and of all forms of alienation – but also a construction of the new, of a utopia, of “that [which] does not yet have a place in our society.”⁶ Abolitionism envisions and builds a world based on collective care, where, as Ruth Wilson Gilmore puts it, “life is precious, anywhere on this big fragile boat afloat across the universe.”⁷

As someone located between the US and Brazil, in what follows I tease out some of the intersecting and transnational systems of oppression that structure the current environment of precarity and disaster in Brazil and the US, and against and beyond which so many, in so many places, assert that Black Lives Matter.

Comparisons between the US and Brazil are nothing new. Many have acknowledged the parallels between racism, the carceral state, and police brutality in both countries, which have also led to solidarities across them.⁸ Fewer have recognized that these dynamics in *both* Brazil and the US are tied to their distinct positions as settler colonies within the capitalist world-system.⁹ In such colonies, European settlers came to stay, building a new polity. In this historical process, they attempted to bring Indigenous and black peoples under logics and practices of accumulation and elimination.¹⁰

Settlers in the US and Brazil relied on and built analogous institutions to this end. Slavery and wars of conquest against Indigenous nations and maroons (*quilombos*) are well-known examples. The similarities between reservation and plantation systems in the US, on the one hand, and Jesuit missions (*aldeamentos*) and *latifúndio* estates in Brazil, on the other – and including between Indian boarding schools in the former and missionary seminaries and colleges in the latter – have been less frequently acknowledged. These were all institutions of confinement (of carcerality),¹¹ arresting Indigenous and

⁶ Fernandes, Sabrina (2019). *Sintomas Mórvidos: A encruzilhada da esquerda brasileira*. São Paulo: Autonomia Literária, 50.

⁷ Wilson Gilmore, Ruth (2014), “Foreword” in *The Struggle Within: Prisons, Political Prisoners, and Mass Movements in the United States*, Dan Berger, ix. Montreal: Kersplebedeb.

⁸ Mattos, Geisa (2017), “From Favelas to Ferguson, Renewed Solidarities for Racial Justice Take Hold” in *NACLA Report on the Americas* Forum on “A Hemispheric Approach to Contemporary Black Activism” 49 (1): 30-32.

⁹ For exceptions, see: Huberman, Bruno and Reginaldo Mattar Nasser (2019), “Pacification, Capital Accumulation, and Resistance in Settler Colonial Cities” in *Latin American Perspectives* 46 (3): 131-148; Brasher, Jordan P. (2020), “Creating ‘Confederate Pioneers’: A spatial narrative analysis of race, settler colonialism, and heritage tourism at the Museu da Imigração, Santa Bárbara d’Oeste, São Paulo” in *Journal of Heritage Tourism*; Poets, Desiree (forthcoming), “Settler Colonialism and/in Brazil: Black and Indigenous Peoples and the Logic of Elimination” in *Settler Colonial Studies*.

¹⁰ Wilderson III, Frank B. (2003), “Gramsci’s Black Marx: Whither the Slave in Civil Society” in *Social Identities* 9 (2): 238; Gill, Bikrum Singh (2016), “Race, Nature, and Accumulation: A Decolonial World-Ecological Analysis of Indian Land Grabbing in the Gambella Province of Ethiopia” (PhD diss., York University).

¹¹ Jurgutis, Jessica (2018), “Colonial Carcerality and International Relations: Imprisonment, Carceral Space, and Settler Colonial Governance in Canada” (PhD diss., McMaster University).

black peoples in demarcated territories under settler sovereignty.¹² They simultaneously freed up new lands for settlement, structured labor regimes, and served as geographies of assimilation/erasure, forcing Indigenous and black peoples under Europeans' 'civilizing mission', which categorized Indigenous and black persons as sub- or non-human and therefore destined to 'disappear' into Europeanness/whiteness/civilization. Nonetheless, Indigenous and black peoples refused and interrupted European settler colonialism, engaging in anti-colonial and world-making practices from the start.¹³ Settler colonialism is an ongoing structure, but it is always unfinished.

As settler colonies, black and Indigenous elimination is a foundational logic of Brazilian and US nation-building and state formation. The genocide of black Brazilians and US-Americans through police violence and under Covid-19, the murders of João Pedro Matos Pinto, George Floyd, Breonna Taylor, and Miguel Otávio, belong to the most recent iteration of this foundation. It is a foundation that institutions of discipline and punishment – prisons, the police, and the military-industrial complex – maintain and renew. To borrow Michelle Alexander's words, "we use our criminal justice system to label people of color "criminals" and then engage in all the practices we supposedly left behind."¹⁴

Settler colonies, for being premised on the normalization of (unfinished) settler conquest in the everyday, are militarized societies. Militarization at home, however, is entangled in world politics and in a transnational political economy of security. The War on Drugs and the War on Terror, for example, aimed to maintain the US' hegemonic position in the world-system. They have had devastating effects on black and brown communities in the US, the Middle East, and to the South of the US-Mexico border, albeit with different intensities. Brazilian involvement in MINUSTAH in Haiti was an attempt to negotiate its dependent position in the world-system, an attempt premised on the ongoing subjugation of the first slave revolution. Rio de Janeiro's Pacification Police Units (UPPs), the military occupation of favelas for the 2014 and 2016 sports mega-events, are a product of the lessons (the tactics, discourses, and expertise) learned in Haiti.¹⁵ In both the US and Brazil, the military-industrial complex and the police maintain contractual ties to Israeli weapons and security companies.¹⁶ They are thereby tied to Israeli

¹² Katherine McKittrick has shown how the plantation was a geography of black placelessness and dispossession. McKittrick, Katherine (2011), "On plantations, prisons, and a black sense of place" in *Social & Cultural Geography* 12 (8): 947-963.

¹³ Estes, Nick (2020), "Freedom is a Place: Long Traditions of anti-colonial resistance in Turtle Island", *Versopolis* [online], March 23. Available at: <https://www.versopolis.com/times/reportage/842/freedom-is-a-place> [accessed: June 9, 2020];

Krenak, Ailton (2019), *Ideias para adiar o fim do mundo*. São Paulo: Companhia das Letras.

¹⁴ Alexander, Michelle (2010), *The New Jim Crow: Mass Incarceration in the Age of Colorblindness*. New York: The New Press, 2.

¹⁵ Müller, Markus-Michael (2016). "Entangled Pacifications: Peacekeeping, counterinsurgency and policing in Port-au-Prince and Rio de Janeiro" in *The Global Making of Policing: Postcolonial Perspectives*, edited by Jana Hönke and Markus-Michael Müller. London: Routledge.

¹⁶ Huberman, Bruno and Reginaldo Mattar Nasser (2019), "Pacification, Capital Accumulation, and Resistance in Settler Colonial Cities": 132.

settler colonialism in Palestine. Palestinian struggles for freedom are, in turn, connected to those of Indigenous and black persons in Brazil and the US.

In light of these entanglements, what is at stake in the present moment is a radical and revolutionary transformation of relations in and between the North and the South. To refuse the deployment of the military at home demands that we refuse its deployment abroad. The fight for police and prison abolition at home is inextricably linked to abolitionist and decolonial presents and futures everywhere. And because local demands are tied to global designs, a world in which black freedom dreams are realized is a world in which Indigenous and Palestinian, but also feminist, queer, and working-class freedom dreams have found a place in our society.

Race, power and nation: colonial crossroads in the 21st century

Paulo Henrique Martins

Professor at the Federal University of Pernambuco, and was a visiting professor at the University of Ceará (Brasil). Former president ALAS 2011-2013.

Race and the racial issue

The racial issue offers itself for a double perspective of analysis. From the anthropological point of view, it is closely linked to the issue of racism, of discriminatory practices involving various ethnic groups, marking the whole history of humanity. The study of the racial question contributes to highlighting types of conflicts that can, at a certain level, intersect with social and economic issues, but which have their own place in the process of building colonial capitalism and the struggles for expanded participatory democracy in modern societies. In this narrower sense, where the racial issue is linked to racism and its consequences, the debate on raciality reveals struggles for identity recognition with a central focus on ethnic differences associated with other religions and gender.

From a broader sociological perspective, the racial question is inscribed at the heart of the programme of colonial capitalism in its political, symbolic and moral perspective. For this broader reading it is important to understand the thesis formulated by the Peruvian sociologist Anibal Quijano on the meaning of race. For him, this is a classification category of the colonial imaginary, a technical condition to justify the colonality of power. In this case, the racial question inspires the colonizing project with its military, economic and religious actions. Race has become an unquestionable dogma in the colonial adventure, serving to justify power hierarchies that "naturally" separate the "white men" colonizers, seen as culturally superior, and the others, not white, as morally and cognitively inferior. The author's contribution is essential for understanding the organization of colonality as a pyramidal and racial structure of power: both at the level involving colonizing and colonized nations and within conquered territories, ideologically justifying the superiority of the conquerors over the original or enslaved populations.

Quijano's theoretical perspective facilitates the separation of race, as a necessary biopolitical device for colonial power, from racism, which is the practical use of biopower in the organization of colonial domination in the concrete spaces of economic, cultural and political activities and daily life. From this standpoint we can highlight three important points for understanding the colonial program: a) the racial question is not a mere appendix but the medulla of the colonial program, ideologically justifying the symbolic and cultural violence that is reproduced until today; b) the racial question inspired the

hierarchical organization of the state apparatus in peripheral societies, guiding both the formation of bureaucratic corporations and the relationship between colonial power and the management of free and enslaved men and existing wealth; c) the racial question organized the formation of the nation, that is, the symbolic and moral devices for the production of national civic solidarity. This project was carried out through the cult of the superiority of the colonizer, but also through the adoption of symbols such as flags and hymns that functioned as devices of co-optation, segregation and subordination of local populations.

The presentation of race as an instituting category of colonial power helps to understand racism as biopolitics and not just moral discrimination against minority or migrant populations. It helps to understand the concrete historical and cultural problems produced by colonial violence and slavery, which in their contemporary versions put in check the liberal ideals of democracy, those of freedom and equality. The racial question was decisive in explaining the violence produced by the colonizers in the political and administrative organization of the heterogeneous populations in the areas of colonization with a view to shaping the national states. It is at the root of neo-colonial elites' intolerance of non-European beliefs, values, habits and customs, but also of the strategies of "whitening" populations - whether by cultural propaganda or by forced or ideologically induced miscegenation.

The material organization of power required the creation of a centralized nation to manage the expansion of commodities, implying the homogenization of languages, values, beliefs and myths. This inclusion of many individuals as citizens by wage labour and consumption was central to generating political and ideological legitimacy for the Western project of colonial national societies more or less homogenized by their flags, anthems and heroes.

Decline of colonialism and antiracist struggles

The organization of the West as a program of planetary colonization is at the origin of historical traumas that impact on the psychic, emotional, cultural and social survival conditions of those populations that were enslaved, such as the African ones, or of those original communities, such as the indigenous ones, that were massacred and had their wealth usurped. The narrative of Western liberal democracy was not sufficient to compensate for a capitalist system that promotes equal access to consumption as an ideal of life, but which removes the material and economic conditions necessary to enable those social groups most vulnerable to the life of utilitarian consumption. National solidarity has been split due to the difficulties of neutralizing the prejudices of whites against non-whites, of facing inequalities in access to the common goods of citizenship, of containing gender and sexual violence, of taking care of the environment.

Colonial ambition has encountered many difficulties in practice due to anti-colonial and anti-racist reactions. In the period of declining economic progress since the end of the 20th century, the increase in social and economic inequality has split legal citizenship, reviving the traumas of cultural and institutional racism. These traumatic memories continue to reproduce in this 21st century, being at the origins of the mechanisms of production of inequalities and social discrimination in relation to migrants, the poor, black and indigenous people, women and individuals of diverse sexual orientations, updating the racial issue as a broad colonial plot that justifies the processes of social segregation.

The racial issue has become a racial struggle whenever attempts to organize the hegemony of colonial power have split due to the useless attempts of "whites" to subordinate local heterogeneous communities to a utilitarian and global mercantile-inspired program. Anti-colonial reactions have always revealed the resistance of territorial communities to the cultural assimilation proposed by the conquistadors. Racial tensions between whites and non-whites have continually manifested themselves in the violence of co-optation strategies and the submission of other cultures. But they were also manifested by the reactions of "others" who insisted on preserving their memories, practices and beliefs about the origins and destinies of community life. The skin tone or particular features are important aspects in justifying anti-racist struggles in that they function as a cultural and aesthetic equivalent, in that they make it easier for people to recognize each other and structure their identities in political and cultural action. But racial struggles are more complex, implying moral contestation of the planetary colonization project that has produced existential and collective disenchantments regarding the reasons for living together.

Only from this perspective of articulating the racial question with the colonial one is it possible to understand the practices of political solidarity involving blacks, Indians, mestizos, migrants, middle classes around emancipatory and anti-racist political struggles. These are fights that turn against ethnic violence, but also against diverse violence related to sexuality, religiosity, environmental and bodily nature. In this 21st century, the varied political, economic and health crises contribute to splitting the national symbolic project, collapsing the ideological arc of national identity, neutralizing the organizing power of the national states.

The breadth of antiracist struggles points to other issues that are not only related to identity recognition and social inclusion, but that reveal the fracture of a civilizational project that has failed in the ambition of planetary uniformity. The recent antiracist struggles inflamed by the murder of George Floyd by a white policeman in the United States but also other cases such as the murder of a black teenager, João Pedro, by policemen in Rio de Janeiro, are no longer on the agenda of the deviations of

an expanding industrial society. They are included in the chaos of a Western civilizational project that no longer satisfactorily responds to the demands of a dignified life for all humans. The colonial national state is in a state of panic. The state apparatus is becoming more repressive and less regulatory of social and cultural conflicts. Civil society is torn apart by the impossibility of continuing to elect raciality as the inspiring reason for the social, classist and racist structure. We are probably witnessing the inauguration of a post-colonial type of society where God appears to everyone equally as black, Indian and white.

Blackness: The Coloniality of Power that Unites us in Brotherhood

Jaime Preciado Coronado

Guadalajara University.

President of the Latin American Association of Sociology, between 2007 and 2009.

An unexpected effect of the coronavirus pandemic is that it united us in a total and simultaneous universal time, which clearly separates the forces that are for life from the impulses that destroy it. It is a global, systemic, real-time crisis that compresses space and time into a total reality. However, the compressed space-time of the here and now carries with it all the stories, all the particularities that shape our ways of being, living, living together in and from the permanent conflict, whose complexity challenges our understanding of the meaning of lifetime. Therefore, everything that emerges in defense of life, justice and equity, everything that resists violence, racism and any form of patriarchal discrimination or oppression challenges us, regardless of our particular condition, identity of reference, sense of belonging, religious or cultural horizon.

We are twinned by stories of oppression that concern us all and the liberation of those chains depends on the individual, community, and collective critical thought and action that we are capable of undertaking. Herein lies the liberating potential that blackness leads by making visible that violence, repression, and inequality are the product of historically constructed racism. The symbolic force of "I Can't Breathe" means oppression and the unpunished murder of African-Americans and other ethnic groups and nations. In addition, other symbolic narratives emerge against the coloniality of power that are synthesized in "Black Lives Matter", a slogan in which they converge from the ideals of Martin Luther King Jr., to those of Malcolm X and the Black Panthers movement.

Blackness is demystifying the democratic character of the foundation of modern states that emerged under the impulse of revolutions. In particular, the 1787 United States Constitution is almost a direct copy of the Roman Republic, which legitimized a slave-owning state that limited citizenship to the property-owning regime. This stands in contrast to the Haitian Revolution of 1791–1804, where land ownership passed into the hands of slaves. Far from the Aristotelian ideal of democracy, like the government of the poor, the 13 Colonies unite under oligarchic and antimonarchical republican demands from the landowner. Republicanism is the political ideology that establishes the undemocratic government of the wealthy. Of the first 10 presidents of the United States, only two, John Adams and

John Quincy Adams, were not slave owners; but, both were attorneys who served bankers and slave owners.

At the top of the coloniality of power, American liberal democracy was founded on the basis of capitalist accumulation by dispossession of the native peoples and the slaveholding of the African-American people. But there were attempts to make a democratic revolution in the United States within the Civil War (1861-1865) that led to the Black Reconstruction (1865-1877), against the power of slavers as a class and slavery as a system.

With the slave institutions overthrown, it was not possible to build a popular democracy since the Reconstruction was subverted by racism and drowned in blood, like the Paris Commune of 1871. Some intellectual talk of an unfinished revolution that opened the most democratic period in the entire history of the United States. Thus, the slavery of African-American people makes the United States a nation founded on an ideal and a lie; blackness compels that country to confront its lie.

The rebellious blackness against brutality and police impunity challenges the American democratic fiction as a whole. Social inequality, racism and white supremacist patriarchy are swaying. What was previously overshadowed is now visible in the contrasts thrown-up by multiple forms of racial segregation that persist:

- African-Americans are 2.5 times more likely to die at the hands of the police than whites (1.4 in the case of women), and one in 1,000 black men fall into this possibility.
- African-American men are more at risk than whites of being arrested; they are more likely to be convicted and face harsher sentences. Their incarceration rate on drug-related charges is six times that of whites.
- Black men are incarcerated at a rate five times higher than whites, and black women twice as many as whites. Of the 2.3 million prisoners in the United States, 40% are black.
- Salary gap: the average weekly wage for black men is 75% of that for whites. According to data from 2016, in the USA it would take 11.5 black households to accumulate wealth equivalent to that of a white household.
- 10.8% of black households do not have services, three percent more than in white households. And 11.5% of black adults do not have health insurance, a percentage that drops to 7.5% among whites.
- Black women are three to four times more likely to die of complications during pregnancy than white women.

- Only 4 percent of Trump's cabinet members are black. There are 3 black senators out of 100. Among the 50 states there is currently not a single black governor. Just 9 percent of state lawmakers are African-American.

The COVID-19 pandemic has racialized biases: counties that are predominantly black have three times the infection rate and almost six times the death rate than counties where white residents are the majority. Among the black community there are higher rates of diabetes, heart disease, and lung disease; those health problems make African-Americans more vulnerable to the new respiratory illness. Blacks are more exposed because they occupy low-wage or essential jobs, where they interact with the public. In addition, there are the problems of housing due to overcrowding and high population density, and the expulsion of rented housing, where 43% corresponded to African-American women thrown into the streets.

We are a brotherhood united by the coloniality of power in the protests against the white, patriarchal, predatory state of life. True, after the murder of George Floyd, the social outbreak in Minneapolis and other USA cities brings to the fore some similarities between Latin America and the United States. They are the same struggles against inequality, racism, segregation and exclusion, which collide against a dominant model of order, "development" and "democracy" for the world that is contrary to life, justice and human dignity.

I can't breathe: The body as a space of racializing colonization

Adrián Scribano

Director of the Centre for Sociological Research and Studies (CIES) and Principal Researcher at the National Council for Scientific and Technical Research (CONICET) of Argentina.

From its founding fathers, the sociology of bodies/emotions has analysed the connection between breath and emotions, breath and experiences, breath and sensations.

In Chapter VII “Low Spirits, Anxiety, Grief, Dejection, Despair”, from the book *The Expression of the Emotions in Man and Animals* by Charles Darwin among other references can be read:

“The breathing becomes slow and feeble, and is often interrupted by deep sighs. As Gratiolet remarks, whenever our attention is long concentrated on any subject, we forget to breathe, and then relieve ourselves by a deep inspiration; but the sighs of a sorrowful person, owing to his slow respiration and languid circulation, are eminently characteristic.” (Darwin 1897: 178)

Right now, there are many people on the planet who feel that their breathing has become rarefied, has become difficult, that the daily experience of "not having a breath" has become increasingly profound.

In the video in which you can see the murder of George Floyd, you hear and feel as he says: *I can't breathe*. Thus, the pornography of power is displayed in a video sequence.

This video is a postcard and a scene. It is a postcard because graphically, it shows, it allows us to observe how the idea of submission to the forces of "law and order" is understood.

Submission is one of the basic forms of the configuration of racialization, not only for those who suffer, but also for those whom see suffering, the witnesses to suffering. It is a postcard that shows how the landscape of forgetting the other as a person is, it is a postcard that paints what the structure is that makes the other someone who is insignificant under subjection, it is a postcard that shows what a structure is like where someone cannot freely use their body.

But it is also a video where the power of the dominator is staged, where a group of police officers protect impunity, where power becomes ominous staging. It is a scene that has a script: the tremendous discretion of the power of a few. It is a script made to measure for those in charge, a script made to measure for those who have the power of life and death. It is a script that structures actions, which is carried out with protocols, which represents the discretion of having the ability to give life or take life. It is a dramatization of a power that hides itself behind the mask of serving and protecting; at the service, of course, of the powerful and the protection of capital.

It is a scene where the actors are prefigured by their dispositions, positions and class conditions, and who are above any hint of resonance in the voice of a human who says “I can't breathe.”

It is a scene that allows us to see how action is plotted and the narration of centuries of occupying a position of dominator and a position of domination in the grammar of action. It is a scene with a grammar of action where there is clearly an other who does not matter, who is absolutely disposable. He is an other who can even pronounce his name, that's why he is pornographic, because he leaves nothing to hide, because he just strives to make people see. This postcard and scene make very clear the regime of colonization of the body in conditions of expansion of the racializing power that capitalism is acquiring in its maximization as a planetary system. This murder is metonymic, it is a “trope” that tells us about the logics of segregationist and racializing power across the planet. It is a sample that speaks of the whole, that implies the history of hundreds of years of the Afro-descendants, they represent all those who suffer through segregation, all those who are below one knee without being able to breathe, all those who are lying on the floor, watched by those who hold the police power of capital, of all those who cannot raise their heads above the custodians of the benefits of a few.

The body as a space of colonization, it is written, it is hatched, it is closed, it is erased as a loss of autonomy, it is a body that tries to scream but cannot do what billions of bodies do: live, feel, experience.

This video clearly shows what the process and forms of colonization are like in the world.

Not being able to breathe is a sensation that covers the whole body, breathing is living, that's why there is a direct relationship between drowning and being drowned, between suffocating and being suffocated. There is a connection between breathing and the show of strength about who can decide on life.

Preventing breathing is a great metaphor of what entire peoples experience, what is suffocated, of what the countries that have knees on their necks feel, of the peoples that are denied in their autonomy. This metaphor adds to the metonymic logic of this territory that is called body in the name of all bodies. It can be seen here there is a central point of the postcard/scene: depersonalization as the key to all colonization. The control strategy of the police protocol is precisely to make the subject lose his autonomy over death, and that is the policy of bodily colonization to live a life of consumption and enjoyment so that nothing can be valid anymore, so that nothing can be felt as such, and in that synaesthesia letting you achieve autonomy. It is a strategy that seeks to return to life pure dependence on mass consumption, the immediacy of the enjoyment of the colonization of the entire planet, of the thousands of secret and silent pandemics that spread throughout the same body.

The postcard that we analyse here was made public to millions of people, which has “gone viral” as a video where it is verified that the intention of the police protocol is depersonalization through the blockade of the capacity of autonomy, and that is what it leads us to think about, what the new racial segregations consists of. What are the knees on the neck of billions of subjects who are outside, who are on the margins, who wander from country to country, who find their identity as a migrant person?

George Floyd's viralized death sparked outrage, rage, anger, sadness, anguish, and countless protests, collective actions, and mobilizations. Collective actions, almost always, are prophets who announce the coming of a new way of understanding the limit of life in common, these collective actions are saying something else that goes beyond the historical struggle of the Afro-descendant people in the country where it occurred, in fact these collective actions are planetary. These collective actions are against all forms of structuring an absolute power over the possibility of being a person, they are in favour of autonomy, they are in favour of all human beings being considered a person in and through the autonomy of building community life. They are collective actions that emphasize what we have in common, that scream that you should never again be understood as someone who can have his neck below anyone's knee. They are collective actions aimed at signalling, once again in recent history, that the [revolution of hope](#) is possible.

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America Invades Itself, from Lockdown to Curfew to Martial Law

Geoffrey R Skoll

Emeritus Professor at SUNY (Buffalo), US

In the last days of May 2020 police riots broke out across the United States and an undeclared martial law was imposed. As people in cities throughout the land marched and demonstrated in protest against police murdering civilians especially Black men, police agents provocateurs vandalized properties, set fires, and fired random gunshots to precipitate what turned out to be police riots in cities throughout the country. State officials declared curfews enforced by armed police, and gendarmerie threatened crowds with live, lethal ammunition along with internationally banned poison gas (so-called tear gas, as if people were attending a funeral or a wedding instead of protesting against violent state repression), and other crowd control measures. The occasion was a police murder of a Black man in Minneapolis, Minnesota USA. It was not an unusual occurrence, but it was exacerbated by months of house arrest, and unemployment not seen since the Great Depression of the 1930s. The sequence was as follows: incident, protest, solidarity protests, provocations, curfews, military occupation.

When policies, practices, institutions, and organizations do not function in furtherance of their stated goals, rarely is it the case that they are just failures or conducted by incompetent leaders. Instead, the most likely reason is that stated goals are a ruse. To find the real goals, observe the effects. The lockdowns, mass house arrests, and the like imposed for the declared purpose of containing a contagious viral infection, are medical nonsense. The notion of quarantining healthy populations but exposing confined and vulnerable populations has never been done. It has never been contemplated by governments or health authorities, and is nonsensical. The wise inquirer looks to what such practices did accomplish instead of claims about what it was supposed to accomplish. It did two things and entailed another. First, it instilled a fear. Second, it controlled crowds. Third, it made people practice compliance drills. Most likely, those were its real goals all along. It was a trial run for total police states. Led by the United States, the experiment was a rousing success. Once it proved its worth, the real repressive regime was imposed first in the United States with other countries sure to follow, just as they followed the lockdown strategy.

It was all so seamless, even easy. But, of course, the herd had been prepared with decades of fear-obedience propaganda and public relations. Not coincidentally it started when the decade of the 1980s dawned. Margaret Thatcher had been elected as prime minister of Britain the year before, and Ronald Reagan elected president of the United States November 1980. Around them the world turned. They

were the figure heads of the world system of capital. Much folderol and hoopla focused the popular mind on their other aspects, but the real point was to return global control to Wall Street and the City of London, which were the places that really mattered. All else was, and still is, a side show.

Nonetheless, in modern times, the masses matter, because once mass societies formed in at the turn of the twentieth century, no one could hope to govern without the masses compliance. Ah, gone were the good old days when monarchs, emperors, and aristocrats could govern by fiat. Some of the first to recognize the power of the masses were, ironically, the fascists—Hitler, Mussolini, and the like. That is what comes of the bourgeois final triumph over the upper classes. The rulers of the twentieth century needed popular support. So was born the science of public relations.

Public relations sold to people in the United States, Britain, and around the world warmed over clap trap they called ‘neoliberalism.’ It was supposed to be an economic plan for “liberal” individualism. In fact, it was a plan to privatize, lower wages, and use the public treasure to enrich the ruling class. It was accompanied by another malapropism, ‘neoconservatism,’ which had nothing to do with conserving anything. It was, instead, a plan of world conquest led by the United States. Not coincidentally neoconservatism worked hand in glove with neoliberalism to loot the rest of the world that lies outside the centers of capital. Instead of paying taxes to support the kings’ wars, people were taxed to give money to the banks, and thence into the pockets of the ruling class. It is an old strategy with new names.

But misfortune struck. It should not have been a surprise, except the global ruling class failed to consult Marx, relying instead on astrologers, scam artists, and banksters who told them to heed MMT (magical monetary theory), which was a scheme to make them richer even while profits declined. Still, as the world entered the third decade of the twenty-first century, the whole global political economy kept needing more and more patching to keep it going, and the more the system crumbled, the more the rulers worried about a mass uprising.

Then, a new influenza strain appeared in a city in the middle of China. As it was new, it soon spread, making a lot of people sick, and killing off the weak. The lockdowns and quarantines, actually mass house arrest, threw people out of work, and in the long run lowered labor costs. If the ruling class cannot make profits from production, they cut overhead to the bone, and tax the masses. It will probably work for a short while, and when it doesn’t, the magical mystery tour functionaries will think of something else.

The United States invaded itself and many other countries as well. It did not invade the rest of America. It relied on chicanery by the FBI (Brazil), the CIA, and State Department to get rid of obstreperous governments and install comprador regimes (Central and South America and the Caribbean). There is still time for change, but not much.

Black Lives Matter and Global Democracy

Fred Evans

Department of Philosophy, Duquesne University, Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, United States
evansf@duq.edu

The *Centro de Investigaciones y Estudios Sociológicos* has requested contributions to its working paper on the recent murder of African-North American George Floyd and the collectives in the United States that are responding to it. The leading collectivity is Black Lives Matter. It was founded in 2013 by African-North Americans as a response to circumstances similar to the killing of George Floyd and the entire history of white violence on black bodies. This violence includes, most especially, that by white police officers in violation of their oath to protect the members of *all* communities in the United States. Hence the need to remind them and the rest of the United States that the lives of black North Americans count as much as those of the rest of us.

Black Lives Matter Foundation, Inc. describes itself as “a global organization in the US, UK, and Canada, whose mission is to eradicate white supremacy and build local power to intervene in violence inflicted on black communities by the state and vigilantes.”ⁱ Because of its emphasis on the global scene, that’s where I want to begin this short essay. Many political commentators accept that global capital and its neo-liberal ideology have created extreme inequality within and between the nation-states of the world.ⁱⁱ This inequality has generated two counter-movements that are global in their reach: one is neo-fascist, the other democratic.

The neo-fascist reactions are typified by Bolsonaro’s Brazil, Orbán’s Hungary, Duterte’s Philippines, Trump’s United States and by many right-wing tendencies in other countries. “Neo-fascism” is a very loose term and its manifestations differ from place to place in important ways.ⁱⁱⁱ But I can lend some specificity to the term by schematizing the characteristics of Trumpism in my own country, the United States. These characteristics amount to a threesome: Bigotry, Authoritarianism, and Thuggery (BAT), in the three levels of rhetoric, political policies, and political appointments. These three political vices are practiced by the current President and his political appointees. They are further abetted by the leadership of the Republican Party and right wing media, religious denominations, and vigilante groups. The three vices are unified by the tacit ideology of white supremacy.

The core supporters of Trumpism and its leader unfortunately consist in a large percentage of the white working class.^{iv} Though some of this cohort are hard core racists many simply feel devalued by the ever-increasing economic and social inequality that separates them from the rest of the population

who they often define as “liberals.” With the changing ethnicity demographics in the United States, these Americans also fear losing the status they have traditionally held by virtue of their skin color alone. Like pre-WWII fascist countries, the Trumpist leadership promises jobs to these followers and assure their racial superiority over minorities. They attempt to fulfill the promise of jobs by increasing tax breaks to corporations, eviscerating environmental and other regulations on the latter, and preventing immigration. On the other hand, the leadership weakens the working class by restricting the power of unions (except for those of the police) and allowing wages and benefits to be lowered or remain stagnant.

Trumpists differ from the pre-WWII forms of fascism in that they do not explicitly depict democracy as a contemptible ideology. Instead, they hollow out democracy by increasing the powers of the executive branch of the government and diminishing the voting power of Blacks and others who they believe would reject the Republican party. They can be assisted in accomplishing these goals because the strength of democracy – its intrinsic openness to redefining itself in ways that can increase inclusivity and other political virtues – is also its fragility: it inadvertently tempts racists, market fundamentalists, and authoritarians to surreptitiously distort democracy’s meaning in ways contrary to its values. This distortion is particularly facilitated when the nation encounters crises like the current confluence of racial, immigration, and health issues, the latter ushered in by the coronavirus pandemic.

In contrast to Trumpism, progressive democratic forces resist both neoliberalism and neo-fascism. This is particularly illustrated by the candidacy of Bernie Sanders and his progressive movement. They propose universal health care, free university tuition, a living wage, the “green new deal,” and other “soft” socialist measures for all inhabitants of the United States. The positive attention their proposals have received by so many people opens the door for challenging and hopefully replacing neo liberalism in the U.S. and the rest of the world. But Sanders has also declared that his movement “will address the racial disparities of wealth and income” and “root out institutional racism wherever it exists.”^v With the same enthusiasm, Black Lives Matter argues for economic and social equality and racial justice for Blacks, including Blacks who may be marginalized within the black global community.^{vi}

I would like to return to the sense in which Black Lives Matter is a global movement. The Black Lives Matter movement is centered on Blacks while still open to alliances with other progressive groups.^{vii} But there is a sense in which its refrain, “Black Lives Matter,” can be universalized while not losing its emphasis on a particular marginalized group. Some white people misunderstand the black movement and throw into the latter’s faces that “*all lives* matter,” as if Blacks were thinking only of themselves. But the intent of the movement is to remind us, and indeed demand, that “Black Lives Matter *too*,” just like everyone else’s. At least that is the way I interpret it. But I also see that this declaration can become a call to struggle more generally. In a democracy, we can say that the commitment to all implies that when

any group in society is marginalized in any pejorative manner, then we insert the name of the group into “X Lives Matter,” for example, “Native American Lives Matter,” and use it as the clarion call for that group’s de-marginalization. In other words, a radical democracy must systematically always be on call to eliminate the economic, social, or political inequality that may be afflicting any group. The overall effect of this continual elimination of marginalization would be to always have these different forms of equality for all as the overriding goal of the society.

To return to the global situation with which I started this essay, “x lives matter” would apply to the peoples or nation-states of the world as well as to different groups within specific countries. Cosmopolitanism would then take equality as its global mission, as the political ethics guiding the universal activism of its adherents. Black Lives Matter, then, is not only the liberation of black people; it is also a model for how a society or a world can progressively and continually eliminate marginalization in accord with its political ethics.

ⁱ Black Lives Matter website, visited June 6, 2020: <https://blacklivesmatter.com/>

ⁱⁱ See for example, Robert Kuttner, *Can Democracy Survive Global Capitalism?* (New York: W.W. Norton and Company, 2018). In his book, Kuttner also provides useful characterization of the meaning of “neo-liberalism,” as does Tony Smith in chapter 2, “The Neoliberal Model of Globalization,” in his *Globalization: A Systematic Marxian Account*. Boston, MA: Brill, 2006).

ⁱⁱⁱ Kuttner, Chapter 11, “Liberalism, Populism, Fascism,” of *Can Democracy Survive Global Capitalism?*

^{iv} More specifically, non-college educated whites, white evangelicals, and white Catholics. Greg Sargent *The Washington Post*, June 4, 2020, visited June 5, 2020: <https://www.washingtonpost.com/opinions/2020/06/04/more-signs-emerge-that-trumps-base-is-eroding/>

^v Bernie Sanders Website, visited June 6, 2020: <https://berniesanders.com/>

^{vi} *Ibid.*, Black Lives Matter website, visited June 6, 2020.

^{vii} *Ibid.*