



FORUM

Crossed pandemics: Racism, police violence, and Covid-19 in Brazil and the United States

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Abstract

The article aims to answer the following question: how is it possible that in the context of the Covid-19 pandemic, as a series of daily activities were suspended in the name of preserving life, police violence has not only continued but worsened in the United States and in Brazil? We argue that racism structures social relations both in the United States and in Brazil, functioning as an essential activity of states that remain involved in the production of different types of physical and symbolic death even amidst the Covid-19 pandemic. Contrary to mainstream International Relations, which narrates its central categories – such as the state – as neutral and non-racialised, we will draw attention to the racial origin of the state and its institutions, such as the police. This article aims to look at these two contexts, Brazil and the United States, in a crossed way. This analysis is only possible because, despite the heterogeneity of the two scenarios, we understand that racism is constitutive of global order and of the institutions that sustain its unfair and unequal character.

Keywords: Brazil; necropolitics; pandemics; police; racism; United States

Introduction

The murder of George Floyd in May 2020 in the United States, amidst the Covid-19 pandemic, triggered a series of anti-racist demonstrations around the world. The protests shed light on the global nature of racial oppression, as well as articulations to resist it. Floyd's brutal murder, however, should not be seen as a mere deviation, but rather as part of a long history of lynching and executions of Black men in the United States.¹

This article aims to answer the following question: how is it possible that in the context of the Covid-19 pandemic, as a series of daily activities were suspended in the name of preserving life, police violence has not only continued but worsened in the United States and in Brazil? As Maya Boddie said, 'outside may be closed, but it is still open season on Black people in the United States.'² Why has this season not been closed too?

¹Angela Davis, 'Introduction', in Angela Davis (ed.), *Policing the Black Man: Arrest, Prosecution, and Imprisonment* (New York: Vintage Books, 2017), pp. xv–xvi.

²Maya Boddie, '#GeorgeFloyd and COVID-19: We're fighting two pandemics', available at: <https://advancementproject.org/georgefloyd-and-covid-19-were-fighting-two-pandemics/>, accessed 1 February 2022.

In the United States, non-white people are historically more likely to be victims of police abuse,³ especially African American men.⁴ As several cases demonstrate, police officers involved in these acts are regularly left unpunished;⁵ in fact, fewer than 2 per cent of those who commit these crimes are convicted.⁶ As indicated by citizen-generated data initiatives such as Mapping Police Violence⁷ and FatalEncounters,⁸ there were between 1,000 and 2,000 records of the use of force by US law enforcement agents that culminated in deaths in 2020. The existence of these initiatives not only demonstrates that US police forces are more lethal than the government admits, but also that the latter fails to monitor these cases – which, regardless of whether it is on purpose or not, reflects the non-existent interest in protecting Black lives. According to FatalEncounters founder Brian Burghart, Black men are not only disproportionately present in these statistics (they are 2.5 times more likely to be killed by police than white men), but they are also particularly overrepresented in specific categories of death such as ‘asphyxiated/restrained’. Law enforcement’s excessive use of lethal force is the sixth leading cause of death among Black men aged 25 to 29, following others such as accidents, suicides, heart disease, and cancer.⁹ In this sense, the death of George Floyd at the age of 46, on 25 May 2020, was not an exceptional event. The brutal suffocation to which a police officer submitted Floyd expresses the racist violence to which African Americans have been subjected since the slavery regime through distinct forms of policing.¹⁰

This issue is not exclusive to the United States.¹¹ In Latin America, for instance, police brutality reaches even more alarming quantitative dimensions, but it similarly targets Black and poor people who live in peripheral territories. According to governmental data systematised by the Brazilian Public Security Forum (Fórum Brasileiro de Segurança Pública), there were 6,416 deaths occasioned by the use of lethal force by Brazilian police forces in 2020.¹² The state of Rio de Janeiro has the highest absolute numbers of police lethality in the country, with 1,245 people killed in police encounters in the same year, 86 per cent of whom were Afro-Brazilians – as published in a report by Rede de Observatórios de Segurança,¹³ a Brazilian citizen-generated data initiative.

Less than a year after the death of George Floyd, on 6 May 2021, 27 people, mostly young men, were killed during a civil police intervention in the Jacarezinho favela, in what became the deadliest police raid in the history of Rio de Janeiro.¹⁴ This operation was executed despite a judicial injunction – issued in June 2020 by the Brazilian Supreme Court in response to the advocacy of

³Following Bonner et al., police abuse is conceptualised as practices ranging from arbitrary arrest, selective surveillance, crowd control, and harassment to sexual assault, torture, forced disappearance, and killings. See Michael Kempa, Mary Rose Kubal, Guillermina Seri ‘Introduction’, in Michelle D. Bonner et al., *Police Abuse in Contemporary Democracies* (New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2018), pp. 1–27.

⁴Alex S. Vitale, *The End of Policing* (London: Verso, 2017); Davis, *Policing the Black Man*.

⁵Sankaran Krishna, ‘Manhunt presidency: Obama, race, and the Third World’, *Third World Quarterly*, 40:2 (2019), pp. 284–19; Patrisse Khan-Cullors and Asha Bandele, *When They Call you a Terrorist: A Black Lives Matter Memoir* (New York: St. Martin’s Griffin, 2017), pp. 284–297.

⁶Luciana Brito, ‘Floyd e protestos no Brasil: A força da participação popular no caos’, *Nexo Jornal* (2021). Available at: <https://www.nexojournal.com.br/colunistas/2021/Floyd-e-protestos-no-Brasil-a-for%C3%A7a-da-participa%C3%A7%C3%A3o-popular-no-caos>.

⁷More information available at: <https://policeviolencereport.org/>, accessed 27 January 2022.

⁸More information available at: <https://fatalencounters.org/our-visualizations/>, accessed 27 January 2022.

⁹More information available at: <https://isr.umich.edu/news-events/news-releases/police-sixth-leading-cause-of-death-for-young-black-men-2/>, accessed 27 January 2022.

¹⁰Michelle Alexander, *The New Jim Crow: Mass Incarceration in the Age of Colorblindness* (New York: The New Press, 2010).

¹¹João H. Costa Vargas, *The Denial of Antiracism: Multiracial Redemption and Black Suffering* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2018).

¹²More information available at: <https://forumseguranca.org.br/wp-content/uploads/2021/10/anuario-15-completo-v7-251021.pdf>, accessed 28 January 2022.

¹³More information available at: http://observatorioseguranca.com.br/wordpress/wp-content/uploads/2021/12/RELATORIO_REDE-DE-OBS_cor-da-violencia_dez21_final.pdf, accessed 28 January 2022.

¹⁴Pedro Paulo Silva, ‘Digestão indigesta: chacina do jacarezinho é extermínio, genocídio, raiva’. Rede de Observatórios de Segurança, 2021, available at: <http://observatorioseguranca.com.br/digestao-indigesta-chacina-do-jacarezinho-e-extermio-genocidio-raiva/>, accessed 28 January 2022.

various civil society entities – restricting police operations in Rio’s favelas during the pandemic to ‘absolutely exceptional’ cases.

A few days after the Jacarezinho massacre, a 24-year-old pregnant Black woman named Kathleen Romeu was killed during a ‘Troy’. Named after the Trojan Horse myth, a ‘Troy’ is a tactic used by Rio’s police forces, which consists of invading a household during a raid and staying there after the operation ends, enabling executions of so-called criminals who are then unaware of police presence.¹⁵ Although one year apart, these episodes occurred amidst a pandemic that, by the time of the operation in Jacarezinho, had already killed more than 400,000 Brazilians, most of whom were Black.¹⁶

This article is not intended as a comparative exercise between the histories and dynamics of race relations in Brazil and the United States.¹⁷ As shown by Kim D. Butler,¹⁸ this kind of research tends to prioritise the racial specificities of these two countries, often neglecting the dialogue between all Black experiences in the Americas – experiences forged by the global Atlantic system associated with the transnational structure of slavery. Unlike comparative history, a transnational approach allows us to draw attention to the contacts, intersections, commonalities, and exchanges involved in the formation of these identities.¹⁹ In this sense, this article starts from the assumption that, in social interactions between Brazilian and US citizens, anti-Black racism continues to function as a metric to assess people’s behaviour and worth.²⁰ Drawing from the concept of anti-Blackness, we claim that Black people have been racialised by the Western white subject’s gaze as the enemy of the nation, in a relation of antagonism towards reason, civilisation, and the fully human and universal being.²¹ For Frank Wilderson III, antagonism is the category that best captures the relationship between nation-states and Black subjects in the making of Western modernity, with anti-Black processes being foundational to the nation-state itself.²² This article aims to draw attention to the continuities of racialised violence that disproportionately affect the Black diaspora in policing, labour, and health, among other fields.

Brazil and the United States were the two largest slave-holding societies in the ‘New World’ and today stand out as the countries with the largest populations of African descent outside Africa.²³ This article aims to look at these two contexts, Brazil and the US, in a crossed way. This analysis is only possible because, despite the heterogeneity of the two scenarios, we understand that racism is constitutive of global order and of the institutions that sustain its unfair and unequal character. In this sense, this article starts from the understanding, shared with decolonial authors and Black feminists, that intersectional inequalities of race, gender, class, and territory are constitutive of the modern world.²⁴ By failing to name such inequalities, the discipline of International Relations (IR)

¹⁵More information available at: http://observatorioseguranca.com.br/wordpress/wp-content/uploads/2021/12/RELATORIO_REDE-DE-OBS_cor-da-violencia_dez21_final.pdf, accessed 28 January 2022.

¹⁶See <https://www.epsjv.fiocruz.br/podcast/negros-sao-os-que-mais-morrem-por-covid-19-e-os-que-menos-recebem-vacinas-no-brasil>; <https://g1.globo.com/bemestar/coronavirus/noticia/2020/06/07/numero-de-mortos-do-coronavirus-passa-de-400-mil-no-mundo.ghtml>, accessed 16 April 2023.

¹⁷Kim Butler, ‘Definições de Diáspora: Articulação de um discurso comparativo’, in Kim Butler and Petrónio Domingues (eds), *Diásporas imaginadas: Atlântico Negro e as histórias afro-brasileiras* (São Paulo: Editora Perspectiva, 2020), pp. 1–36.

¹⁸Butler, ‘Definições de Diáspora.’

¹⁹Butler, ‘Definições de Diáspora.’

²⁰Butler, ‘Definições de Diáspora.’

²¹Maria Andrea dos Santos Soares, ‘Antinegritude: ser negro e fobia nacional’, *Horizontes antropológicos*, 28:63 (2022), pp. 165–94.

²²Frank Wilderson, III, ‘Gramsci’s Black Marx: Whither the slave in civil society?’, *Social Identities*, 9:2 (2003), pp. 225–40; J. H. C. Vargas, ‘A Diáspora Negra como genocídio: Brasil, Estados Unidos ou uma geografia supranacional da morte e suas alternativas’, *Revista da ABPN*, 1:2 (2010), pp. 31–55; Ana Luiza Pinheiro Flauzina and Thula Rafaela Pires, ‘Políticas da morte: Covid-19 e os Labirintos da Cidade Negra’, *Revista Brasileira de Políticas Públicas*, 10:2 (2020), pp. 75–92.

²³Butler, ‘Definições de Diáspora.’

²⁴Aníbal Quijano, ‘Colonialidade do poder, eurocentrismo e América Latina’, in Edgardo Lander (ed.), *A colonialidade do saber: eurocentrismo e ciências sociais. Perspectivas latinoamericanas* (Buenos Aires: CLACSO, Consejo Latinoamericano de Ciencias Sociales, 2005), pp. 105–27; Patricia Hill Collins, *On Intellectual Activism* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press,

continues to be their accomplice, unable to effectively resist them. While imagining a world divided between nation-states, IR conceals much deeper boundaries organised around other temporalities and spatialities. We refer to boundaries that did not originate in the 17th century with the Peace of Westphalia and with the consequent emergence of nation-states, as the official history of the discipline would tell us, but which rather emerged with the conquest of America in the 15th and 16th centuries. These boundaries or these deep cuts spring from a wider world, a modern/colonial world system that emerged in a relational way from the violent encounter between Europe and the non-European world – a world that would then be racialised and dehumanised. The combined processes of colonisation, racialisation, and capitalist exploitation (with its associated racial and gendered division of labour) have set the conditions for the rise of Europe as a geopolitical unit that supposedly holds the monopoly on knowledge, civilisation, humanity, and progress. As a consequence, the genealogy of modernity is no longer conceived as an endogenous and autonomous process, in line with a Big Bang model;²⁵ instead, it depends on coloniality²⁶ and on the creation of hierarchies that rank humanity in relation to the norm of whiteness that lies behind non-racialised abstractions of the international system, such as the nation-state. In this article, the nation-state is understood as one among countless institutions that aim to reproduce processes of racialisation and dehumanisation of Afro-diasporic populations. The ‘international’ was thus constituted and came to know itself in relation to what it excluded from its own contours. Therefore, the boundaries drawn by architects of the discipline, defining who is inside and who is outside, cannot be understood apart from the racial, gendered, and sexual hierarchies of humanity developed by colonial powers and imposed on the Americas since the 15th century. And above all, such boundaries rely on the exclusion of a radical subjectivity: the Black being, positioned in an antagonistic relation towards modern ways of being in the world.

We develop this article by mobilising and establishing a dialogue between US and Brazilian authors and activists who, in their thoughts and actions, have more affinities with each other than with their respective nation-states. During her visit to Brazil in 2019, for instance, Black activist Angela Davis said: ‘I think I learn more from Lélia Gonzalez than you could ever learn from me’, revealing how ‘incomprehensible it is that one of the most important intellectuals in debates on the condition of Black women in Brazil is not as read and valued in Brazilian schools and universities as she should.’²⁷ In this sense, one of this article’s contributions is to propose a horizontal dialogue between theorists of decoloniality and the work of Brazilian intellectuals such as Lélia Gonzalez. By this, we challenge the absence and invisibility of Black Brazilian intellectuals in this tradition, despite the fact that, in the Americas, Brazil was the country where the largest number of enslaved Africans landed.²⁸

On the one hand, we understand, in line with Patricia Hill Collins, that intersectional inequalities have specific dynamics and unique manifestations in each society. In the case of Brazil, for instance, racism has always been denied through the farce of ‘racial democracy’, the assumption of a harmonious and peaceful coexistence between white, Black, and Indigenous people,²⁹ in contrast to the system of segregation in the United States. In Brazil, we have been socialised to narrate

2013); Patricia Hill Collins, *Pensamento Feminista Negro. Conhecimento, consciência e a política do empoderamento* (São Paulo: Boitempo, 2019).

²⁵John Hobson, *The Eurocentric Conception of World Politics: Western International Theory, 1760–2010* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012); John Hobson and Alina Sajed, ‘Navigating beyond the Eurofetishist frontier of critical IR theory: Exploring the complex landscapes of non-Western agency’, *International Studies Review*, 19:4 (2017), pp. 547–72.

²⁶Walter D. Mignolo, *Historias locales/disenos globales: Colonialidad, conocimientos subalternos y pensamiento fronterizo* (Madrid: Akal, 2003).

²⁷Available at: <https://www.hypeness.com.br/2021/01/lelia-gonzalez-foi-a-nossa-angela-davis-e-deveria-ser-leitura-obrigatoria-nas-escolas-e-universidades/>, accessed 28 January 2022.

²⁸Joaze Bernardino-Costa, ‘Decolonialidade, Atlântico Negro e intelectuais negros brasileiros’, *Sociedade e Estado*, 33:1 (2018), pp. 117–35.

²⁹Gilberto Freyre, *Casa-grande & Senzala: Formação da família brasileira sob o regime da economia patriarcal* (São Paulo: Global Editora, 2006); Freyre, *Gilberto, sobrados e mucambos* (Rio de Janeiro: Ed. Record, 1996).

our national identity in a homogeneous and singular way, through the claim that Iberian cultural heritages have supposedly made the population averse to conflict, cordial, and of enormous plasticity. This narrative hampers the recognition of racism among us,³⁰ as well as the adoption of public policies to tackle it. Hence the importance of starting this article with quantitative data that invalidate the thesis of Brazilian ‘racial democracy’ and reveal a scenario of racialised violence as brutal as that of the United States. In Brazil, as in other countries of Iberian colonisation, what Lélia Gonzalez called ‘racism by denial’ prevails. In contexts characterised by this sophisticated expression of racism, racial segregation is not explicitly legitimised by the state. Instead, ideologies of miscegenation and racial assimilation predominate, hindering objective awareness of racism, leaving racial hierarchies untouched, and advancing the ideal of whitening the population.³¹ For Abdias do Nascimento, the ideology of racial democracy that was turned into dogma by official Brazil has worked to ease the guilty conscience of dominators – for instance, by pointing to a large mixed population as proof that there was no racism in Brazil.³² Nevertheless, according to Nascimento: ‘The myth of “racial democracy” maintains a misleading façade that hides and disguises the reality of a racism as violent and as destructive as that of the United States.’³³ Or as Lélia Gonzalez puts it: ‘The problems of Blacks in Brazil are the problems of Blacks in the world.’³⁴

We argue that racism structures social relations both in the United States and in Brazil, functioning as an essential activity of states that remain involved in the production of different types of physical and symbolic death, not only within the scope of security policies but also in the realms of labour and social life more broadly. Both states have been produced, from their foundation, as incompatible with fully present Blackness. In this sense, the Black being’s exclusion is not a deviation, an accident that can be remedied through cultural or administrative adjustments.³⁵ In line with Afro-pessimist perspectives, there is no possibility of assimilation, recognition, or political pact for those subjects who, as argued by Ana Flauzina and Thula Pires, ‘always walk near the demarcated line of death in our societies.’³⁶

Finally, we must highlight that although we are focusing on a specific historical moment when the United States and Brazil were under the extreme-right governments of Trump and Bolsonaro, hence with a greater chance of escalating racial violence, we understand that racialised violence is not exclusive to these governments; instead, it crosses the history of both countries, forged by transatlantic slavery. Drawing from Afro-pessimist literature, we argue that anti-Black violence is gratuitous and structural, regardless of the health context or the government in place.³⁷ In this sense, the production of the Black being as abjection is always present,³⁸ and violence and terror are normalised – or, as Vargas puts it, racialised violence becomes ‘unpredictable in its predictability.’³⁹ From a structural and historical perspective, the article argues that both in the United States and in Brazil there is a normality that cannot be quarantined, a normality that defines who must live

³⁰Jessé Souza, ‘O mito brasileiro e o encobrimento da desigualdade’, in Jessé Souza (ed.), *A ralé brasileira; quem são e como vivem* (Belo Horizonte: Ed. UFMG, 2009), pp. 29–103; Emerson Rocha, ‘Cor e dor moral’, in Souza (ed.), *A ralé brasileira*, pp. 353–84.

³¹Lélia Gonzalez, ‘A categoria político-cultural de amefricanidade’, *Tempo Brasileiro*, 92:93 (1988), p. 69–82.

³²Abdias Nascimento, *Thoth, escriba dos deuses: Pensamento dos povos africanos e afrodescendentes* (Brasília: Senado Federal, 1997); Ananda Vilela and Marta Fernández, ‘Abdias do Nascimento: Quilombist praxis amidst the genocide of Black people’, in Smita A. Rahman, Katherine A. Gordy, and Shirin S. Deylami (eds), *Globalizing Political Theory* (New York: Routledge, 2022), pp. 159–170.

³³Abdias Nascimento, *O negro revoltado* (Rio de Janeiro: Nova fronteira, 1982), pp. 28–9.

³⁴Quoted in Butler, ‘Definitions of Diaspora’, p. XI.

³⁵João H. Costa Vargas ‘Desidentificação: A lógica de exclusão antinegra do Brasil’, in Osmundo Pinho and João Vargas (eds), *Antinegitude: O Impossível sujeito negro na formação social brasileira* (Cruz das Almas: Editora UFRB, 2016), pp. 13–30.

³⁶Flauzina and Pires, ‘Políticas da morte’, p. 89.

³⁷Vargas, ‘Desidentificação’; Wilderson, ‘Gramsci’s Black Marx’.

³⁸Saydia Hartman, *Scenes of Subjection: Terror, Slavery, and Self-Making in Nineteenth-Century America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997).

³⁹Vargas, ‘Desidentificação’, p. 15.

or die, and which states, structured by whiteness, continue to rely on. After all, this normality is precisely what sustains its material and symbolic reproduction.

Contrary to the discipline of International Relations, which narrates its central categories – such as the state and the social contract that, according to contractualism, gives rise to it – as neutral and non-racialised, in the first section we will draw attention to the racial origin of the state and its institutions, such as the police. Following this brief genealogy of police forces in Brazil and the United States, we argue, in the second section, that the rise in deaths of Black men due to police violence during the Covid-19 ‘crisis’ can only be explained by the configuration of the necropolitics project as an essential activity of states. Starting from an intersectional lens, the third part of the article explores this necropolitics project through the overlap between gender and race markers, denouncing the exposure of young Black men to a double war: against Covid-19 and against police intervention in their territories. In the fourth part of the article, we show how processes of racialisation that create conditions of possibility for projects aimed at ‘making die’ also affect the realm of labour, creating an over-exploited mass that, in the context of Covid-19, was simultaneously seen as essential for the maintenance of basic services and left unprotected and exposed to viral contamination. Finally, in the fifth and last section, we conclude that for this racialised and dehumanised portion of the population, silenced by the discipline of IR, whose experience of normality has always been that of permanent war, the normal has always been an object of dispute. To exemplify this dispute, we discuss the example of concrete actions of mothers whose Black sons have been murdered by state agents in Brazil and in the US, emphasising the interconnected, transnational, and diasporic dimension of the mourning and struggle faced daily by these women. The discipline of IR, through its theories, analytical categories, and worldviews, conceals and remains blind to intersectional inequalities that constitute it; therefore, in order to make them visible, we need other stories centred on subjects who do not have access to the global political scene, as is the case of mothers who fight for justice for their dead relatives.

Racism and police violence

The dominant reading regarding the police conceptualises those institutions as tools for maintaining the state – a state that, in turn, represents the ‘general will of society’ by means of elections and other democratic processes.⁴⁰ The police are vital to sustaining the social contract, supposedly agreed between free and equal individuals,⁴¹ which lies at the foundation of liberal democracy and of the main imaginary of IR. In this sense, the police are seen as ‘neutral’ institutions that ensure peaceful social relations through ‘technical’ practices; that is to say, following the precepts of the social contract and of a liberal-democratic state, law enforcement operates in an apolitical and neutral fashion, and moments that contradict this discourse are constructed as deviations from the police purpose.⁴²

But as Charles Mills argues,⁴³ the social contract as conceived in liberal discourse is a myth, establishing a state based on a racist legal system that distinguishes the status of white and non-whites. As a result, racial injustice is not a deviation from the assumed functioning of modern society but is part of its constitution; racial violence is inscribed in the modern state apparatus, which is essential to structure and protect the privileged position of whiteness over the subaltern position of non-white subjects.⁴⁴

Although the state, a central analytical category of IR, is mostly conceived within this field as a neutral, rational, abstract, and non-racialised agent, by following those propositions it can instead be conceptualised as an apparatus that aims to reproduce the material and symbolic privileges of

⁴⁰Vitale, *End of Policing*, p. 32.

⁴¹Charles W. Mills, *The Racial Contract* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1997).

⁴²Vitale, *End of Policing*; Bonner et al., *Police Abuse*.

⁴³Mills, *Racial Contract*.

⁴⁴David Theo Goldberg, *The Racial State* (Malden, Massachusetts: Blackwell, 2002); Frantz Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth* (New York: Grove Press, 2004).

whiteness. ‘Colour lines’⁴⁵ are not sustained by chance; instead, the transnational racial structure is reproduced and normalised through visceral and daily violence that aims at exterminating a significant part of those racialised as non-white economically, socially, and physically, as a condition of possibility for making white and privileged populations live by the modern/colonial project. In this sense, while legitimising a division of the world into nation-states, the racial contract is global and cannot be understood apart from the colonial cartography drawn over the last 500 years of European domination and white supremacy.⁴⁶ According to Mills: ‘The color line is not merely global in the sense of dividing countries, but global in the sense of running through and dividing all of us, encouraging us to climb higher on the racial/color/shade ladder and leave behind some other stigmatized “darker” group ... with whom we do not identify.’⁴⁷

It is unsurprising, then, that although law enforcement as currently understood is relatively new, its genealogy can be traced back to the emergence of racial capitalism and of forms of policing⁴⁸ associated with colonial/imperial endeavours. While that is not exclusive to Brazil and the United States, police origins in both countries are found in the plantation system, grounded in the kidnapping and enslavement of African and Indigenous populations – as illustrated by ‘slave patrols’ that ‘capture fugitives, police the behavior and movement of enslaved Africans, prevent resistance efforts, and protect the institution of slavery’.⁴⁹

In Brazil, the institutionalisation of police forces began in the 19th century with the arrival of the Portuguese royal family in the city of Rio de Janeiro, which was then the capital of Brazil and of the Portuguese Empire.⁵⁰ But previously there had been instances of enslaved Africans being armed and given the mandate to procure and capture fugitives, due to their knowledge of the city outskirts.⁵¹ The institutionalisation that occurred in 1800s Rio de Janeiro is thus a development of these older forms of policing, which unsurprisingly already worked to exterminate those perceived as both inhuman and enemies of the racialised social order.⁵² From then on, these practices have created an indistinction between policing and militarism, inscribing warfare into daily life until this moment – as the Jacarezinho Massacre unfortunately attests.

In the United States, ‘slave patrols’ were historically enmeshed with the introduction of practices that came from the London model of police, which itself emerged with the British colonisation of Ireland,⁵³ with the US colonisation of the Philippines and the creation of policing forces to ensure racialised social control in this imperial endeavour;⁵⁴ as well as with the Texas Rangers that ‘hunt down native populations accused of attacking white settlers’.⁵⁵ In other words, the ‘problem’ of managing racialised populations also gave rise in the United States to institutions characterised, as described by Fanon in relation to another colonial context, by the ‘language of pure violence’

⁴⁵W. E. B. Du Bois, *The Souls of Black Folk* (New York: Crest Books, 1961).

⁴⁶Mills, *Racial Contract*.

⁴⁷Charles Mills, ‘Unwriting and unwhitening the world’, in A. Anievas, N. Manchanda and R. Shilliam et al. (eds), *Race and Racism in International Relations: Confronting the Global Colour Line* (London: Routledge, 2015), pp. 202–214 (p. 208).

⁴⁸Here, policing is conceived as discourses, practices, and knowledges for impeding threats to the racialised social order. In these terms, contemporary police forces are part of lineages traced to colonial and imperial enterprises. See Mark Neocleous, *The Fabrication of Social Order: A Critical Theory of Police Power* (London: Pluto Press, 2000); Michel Foucault, *Security, Territory, Population: Lectures at the Collège de France 1977–1978* (New York: Picador, 2007).

⁴⁹Betty L. Wilson ‘Under the brutal watch: A historical examination of slave patrols in the United States and Brazil during the 18th and 19th centuries’, *Journal of Black Studies*, 53:1 (2022), pp. 3–18 (p. 4).

⁵⁰Thomas Holloway, *Polícia no Rio de Janeiro: Repressão e resistência numa cidade do século XIX* (Rio de Janeiro: FGV, 1997).

⁵¹Lélia Gonzalez, ‘O movimento Negro na última década’, in Lélia Gonzalez and Carlos Alfredo Hasenbalg, *Lugar de Negro* (Rio de Janeiro: Editora Marco Zero, 1982), pp. 9–66.

⁵²Holloway, *Polícia*.

⁵³Vitale, *End of Policing*, p. 36.

⁵⁴Alfred W. McCoy, *Policing America’s Empire: The United States, the Philippines, and the Rise of the Surveillance State* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 2009).

⁵⁵Vitale, *End of Policing*, p. 43.

through ‘direct intervention by police and the military [to] ensure [that] the colonized are kept under scrutiny, and contained by rifle butts and napalm.’⁵⁶

In other words, while the liberal discourse constructs the police as ‘neutral’ institutions that operate through ‘technical’ practices and are legitimised by liberal-democratic processes establishing the state to protect the social contract, the police genealogy, in Brazil and the United States, instead supports Mills’s point that liberal democracy is actually based on a racial contract, and, thus, warfare has been inscribed by various forms of policing into the daily life of non-white populations since colonisation.⁵⁷

Necropolitics as an essential activity of the state

We argue that the worsening of police killings during the pandemic both in Brazil and in the United States is ultimately explained by racism. On the one hand, the Covid-19 pandemic has globalised the language of war against the virus and mobilised states to summon their national ‘soldiers’ to unite in a collective effort against a common and invisible enemy. On the other hand, some of these ‘soldiers’ have continued to be targets of an older ‘war’⁵⁸ carried out by the police/military forces of their respective states. In order to deter the pandemic and flatten the infection and death curves, these people were asked to fight and cooperate with the state and international organisations as Americans, Brazilians, Colombians, or global citizens. Simultaneously, the same racialised ‘combatants’ were still living that ‘war’ with which they were much more familiar, having long been the target of states that were foreign to them and therefore condemned to live in a permanent war zone.⁵⁹

As previously mentioned, the function of the racial contract that grounds the state is to ensure white privilege at the expense of non-white lives; for that purpose, the enemies of society – e.g., viruses or racialised populations – are to be exterminated. In line with this argument, the historically constructed racial inequalities that structure international order explain why Black and Indigenous people were the most threatened by Covid-19, by state omission, and by the shortage of ventilators and other medical equipment, while also explaining the policy that impeded the breathing of George Floyd in Minneapolis in the United States, or of Iago César in the Brazilian Acari favela in 2020. The Jacarezinho Massacre was yet another chapter of the state’s necropolitical project. Therefore, the production of death does not result from a mere deviation of police officers, poor planning, or the militarisation of police forces but from systematic and consistent state actions that are never suspended,⁶⁰ not even amidst a global pandemic.

The police’s lethal power and will were not suspended during the pandemic precisely because this is the essential function of the state and its institutions. For it is through this activity that the state continues to fulfil its most basic function, that of establishing a break and distinguishing between those who should live or die, of demarcating in a performative and bloody way the unequal distribution of the value of lives – that is, of deciding who are the ‘wretched of the earth’. By expressing itself as a project, this power to kill cannot be delegated to a virus that, although

⁵⁶ Fanon, *Wretched of the Earth*, p. 4.

⁵⁷ Mills, *Racial Contract*.

⁵⁸ In both countries, the current discourse of the ‘war on drugs’, whose concrete target is not found in its declared objectives but rather in the social markers of race, class, and territory, continues to structure societies forged by slavery. See Kojo Koram, *The War on Drugs and the Global Colour Line* (London: Pluto Press, 2019). These social markers also structure their respective prison systems: their incarcerated populations are not only among the largest in the world, with the United States in the lead and Brazil in third place, but they are also disproportionately composed of the poorest and most racialised populations. See Ana L. P. Flauzina, *Corpo negro caído no chão: O sistema penal e o projeto genocida do estado brasileiro* (Rio de Janeiro: Contraponto, 2008); Alexander, *The New Jim Crow*.

⁵⁹ Collins, *Pensamento*.

⁶⁰ Achille Mbembe, *Necropolítica* (Santa Cruz de Tenerife: Editorial Melusina, 2011). See also Berenice Bento, ‘Necrobiopoder: Quem pode habitar o Estado-nação?’, *Cadernos Pagu*, 53 (2018), pp. 185–305.

disproportionately affecting peripheral bodies and territories, turns out to be too indiscriminate, interdixing collective and ritualistic experiences of mourning.

The deaths resulting from the police raid in Jacarezinho indicate how asymmetric the racial contract that grounds the state is, a pact through which a significant part of its population is dehumanised.⁶¹ This agreement is so ingrained in the Brazilian state that initiatives to suspend it, as in the case of the Brazilian Supreme Court's injunction, are circumvented and become an object of mockery. The name that was given to the Jacarezinho operation, *Exceptis* (Exception), was deemed by several social movements and human rights entities (including the Rio de Janeiro State Public Defender's Office, and civil society organisations such as *Coletivo Papo Reto*, *Redes da Maré*, and *Justiça Global*) as a challenge to the Supreme Court injunction that had restricted police operations during the pandemic 'except in situations of absolute exceptionality.' The operation, considered legitimate by state agents, police officers, the governor, and the president, demonstrated that when it comes to peripheral territories – i.e., favelas – the standards of normality and exception are not defined by the 'rule of law' but rather by brute force, as remarked by Fanon.⁶²

'We revolt because we can't breathe'

The first thing we notice in this talk about racism is that everyone thinks it is natural. That the Black man deserves to live in misery. Why? Well, because his qualities are worth nothing: irresponsibility, intellectual incapability, childishness, etc. Hence, it is natural for him to be chased by the police because he doesn't like to work, you know? If he doesn't work, he's a trickster, and if he is a trickster, he is a thief. So, of course, he has to be arrested. ... A Black woman, of course, is a cook, cleaning lady, servant, the woman at the turnstile or a prostitute. We just need to read the newspaper, listen to the radio and watch television. They don't aim for anything. Their place is in the favelas. Racism? In Brazil? Who said that? This is an American thing. Here there are no differences because everyone is Brazilian above all, thank God. Here Blacks are well treated, have the same rights as we have. So much so that, when they make an effort, they can move upwards in life. I know one who is a doctor; very polite, cultured, elegant and with such fine features ... doesn't even seem Black.⁶³

Excess and omission are simultaneous in the actions of the state. If, on the one hand, its punitive arm is continuously conducting operations to exterminate Black populations in particular territories,⁶⁴ on the other hand, the state withdraws from spaces associated with the 'zone of non-being',⁶⁵ avoiding its essential public functions in the provision of infrastructure, health care, education, and leisure.

These populations are thus subject to double violence that prevents them from breathing due to what they lack (ventilators, hospitals, food, dignity), but also due to their asphyxiation with a knee, hood, or plastic bag, as was respectively the case in the deaths of George Floyd and of Daniel Prude in Minnesota, and of Iago César Gonzaga in the Acari favela in Rio de Janeiro – all of them in 2020, in the midst of the Covid-19 pandemic. George Floyd's last words, 'I can't breathe', echoed those of Eric Garner, murdered in the United States by the police in 2014, as well as Frantz Fanon's remark, 'We revolt because we can't breathe', becoming a universal expression of the daily reality of living with the threat and fear of state-sanctioned violence.⁶⁶

⁶¹Flauzina, *Corpo negro*.

⁶²Fanon, *Wretched of the Earth*.

⁶³Lélia Gonzalez, 'Racism and sexism in Brazilian culture', trans. M. J. Venâncio, M. Mendonça, and G. Segat, *New Sociological Perspectives*, 1:1 (2021), pp. 147–159 (p. 149). Original work published 1984.

⁶⁴IPEA – Instituto de Pesquisa Econômica Aplicada (2020). *Atlas da Violência*, available at: {www.ipea.gov.br}, accessed 1 February 2022.

⁶⁵Frantz Fanon, *Pele Negra, Máscaras Brancas* (Salvador: EDUFBA, 2008).

⁶⁶Nigel Gibson, 'Combat breathing: The spirit of rebellion in the US', *New Frame* (5 June 2020), available at: {<https://www.newframe.com/combat-breathing-the-spirit-of-rebellion-in-the-us/>}, accessed 1 February 2022.

In this context, Black boys and men have been systematically identified as privileged targets of state violence through their racialised and gendered representations as criminals, delinquents, irresponsible vagrants, and potential rapists.⁶⁷ Stereotypes attributed to Black masculinities, associated with physical strength but not with strength of intellectual or moral character, have contributed to the idea that Black men should have their mobility and vitality constantly undermined. In the Brazilian and US imagination, the notion that Black men are essentially dangerous, irrational, and marked by unbridled and threatening sexuality has long prevailed, and it is still hegemonic among the white middle and upper classes. As Túlio Augusto Custódio highlights, 'being a Black man involves a social marker that places him as a target for state violence, mostly perpetrated by the police.'⁶⁸

The attributes usually associated with the male gender, such as powerful, rational, strong, intellectual, and honourable, are forged in the logic of cis heteronormative whiteness and are thus neither extensive nor acceptable to all men; instead, they apply only to a particular group, the white male elite.⁶⁹ Black men are seen in Brazil and the United States as dangerous and not powerful, and they are punished when exhibiting so-called masculine characteristics.⁷⁰ They are also denied the allegedly masculine qualities of leadership, intellectual competence, and human rationality.⁷¹

Fanon helps us understand why Black male sexuality cannot be grasped in the same register as that of the supposedly universal white masculinity.⁷² Insofar as Black men are not seen as men, but as dehumanised male subjects,⁷³ they cannot exercise the symbolic place of Man.⁷⁴ Thus, the Black subject is represented as truculent and brutal when destabilising the geographical and symbolic boundaries of the city and as docile and subservient when useful and submissive to the interests of the privileged classes.⁷⁵ Residents of the peripheries of Rio de Janeiro and Washington are only tolerated when they cross city spaces in an atomised way to work as maids, doormen, drivers, and construction workers for the wealthy classes. However, their bodies are criminalised, violated, contained, or deprived of freedom whenever their movements transgress the limits of a subaltern integration into the city.⁷⁶

In this sense, class, gender, and racism operate intersectionally, reconfiguring how Black men experience gender. Thus, the unemployed Black man, as in the case of George Floyd, or the Black man who earns a meagre salary, is generally seen either as lazy, failed, and incapable, or as a sexual athlete perceived as a potential rapist or as an aggressive person, becoming the favoured target of police brutality.⁷⁷

In an article published in this Forum, Lester Spence shows us how hip-hop culture has contributed to making counter-hegemonic readings of Black experiences globally visible. Black men

⁶⁷ Angela Davis, 'Rape, racism, and the myth of the Black rapist', in *Women, Race, and Class* (New York: Vintage Books, 1981), pp. 172–201; Lélia Gonzalez, 'A categoria político-cultural de amefricanidade', *Tempo Brasileiro. Rio de Janeiro*, 92/3 (1988), pp. 69–82; Osmundo Pinho, 'O corpo do homem negro e a guerra dos sexos no Brasil', in Henrique Restier and Rolf Malungo de Souza (eds), *Diálogos contemporâneos sobre homens negros e masculinidades* (São Paulo: Ciclo Contínuo Editorial, 2019), pp. 105–30.

⁶⁸ Túlio Augusto Custódio, 'Per-vertido Homem Negro: Reflexões sobre masculinidades negras a partir de categorias de sujeição', in Restier and Malungo de Souza (eds), *Diálogos contemporâneos*, pp. 131–161 (p. 138).

⁶⁹ Collins, *On Intellectual Activism*.

⁷⁰ Collins, *On Intellectual Activism*.

⁷¹ Collins, *On Intellectual Activism*; Lélia Gonzalez, 'Racismo e sexismo na cultura brasileira', *Revista Ciências Sociais Hoje*, ANPOCS (1984), pp. 223–244.

⁷² Fanon, *Pele Negra*.

⁷³ See also Maria Lugones, 'Rumo a um feminismo descolonial', *Revista Estudos Feministas*, 22:3 (2014), pp. 935–52.

⁷⁴ Custódio, 'Per-vertido Homem Negro'.

⁷⁵ Mara Viveros Vigoya, *As cores da masculinidade. Experiências interseccionais e práticas de poder na Nossa América* (Rio de Janeiro: Papéis Selvagens, 2018).

⁷⁶ Tatiana Moura, Marta Fernández, and Victoria Page, 'Power from the peripheries: Art, culture and masculinities in Rio', in Suzanne Clisby, Mark Johnson, and James Turner (eds), *Theorizing Cultures of Equality* (London: Routledge, 2020), pp. 158–70.

⁷⁷ Luiza Bairros, 'Nossos feminismos revisitados', *Estudos Feministas*, 95:2 (1995), pp. 458–63.

such as Eric Garner and George Floyd are represented by MCs both as individuals who struggle to generate extra income for their families and as targets of racialised police violence. In fact, hip-hop functions as a powerful transnational cultural production by enabling political communication and advocacy by the Black diaspora. In this sense, MCs can be seen as interpreters of their societies, in Brazil as in the United States. However, unlike mainstream social scientists, MCs look at their societies from the perspective of vulnerable Black populations, giving rise to ‘a world depicted without filter’.⁷⁸ This is the world denounced, for example, by the Brazilian hip-hop group Racionais MC’s, when they open their song ‘Chapter 4, verse 3’ by exposing statistics of violence in Brazil: ‘60% of young people from the periphery without criminal records have already suffered police violence. For every four people killed by the police, three are Black. In Brazilian universities, only 2% of the students are Black. Every four hours, a young Black man dies violently in São Paulo. This is Primo Preto speaking, another survivor.’⁷⁹ Or in the song ‘Homem na Estrada’, in which they draw attention to police brutality: ‘I don’t trust the police, that fucking race!!! If they find me shot on the sidewalk, they kick me in the face and spit on me, yeah. I would bleed to death ... That’s why I do my own security.’⁸⁰

Racialised capitalism and the work that cannot stop

Racism in the sense of anti-Blackness has ordered the limits of policies adopted worldwide against the pandemic.⁸¹ The Black being was at once understood as a disposable body on which vaccines with unforeseen effects could be tested, as suggested by two French doctors,⁸² and also as the body that least deserved those same vaccines, as revealed by their unequal global distribution, with disproportionately negative effects for sub-Saharan Africa. The Black being’s dehumanisation process expressed in this cycle, through suggestions that Africans should be forced to offer their bodies as guinea pigs for the production of vaccines to which they will then, at best, have much-delayed access, exceeds any Marxist grammar. As Wilderson shows us, Marxism proves incapable of translating the Black being’s expulsion from humanity and civil society.⁸³

The unequal distribution of the value of life is intimately connected to an unequal division of labour structured by colonial relations. For Fanon, colonial injustice is based as much on a subjective dimension that dehumanises non-white subjects as it is on the socio-economic domination associated with exploitation and enslavement.⁸⁴ Fanon advises us not to reduce colonialism and racism exclusively to a matter of class: ‘In the colonies, the economic infrastructure is also a super-structure. The cause is an effect: You are rich because you are white. You are white because you are rich. This is why a Marxist analysis should always be slightly stretched when it comes to addressing the colonial issue.’⁸⁵

Subjective and material processes are mutually reinforcing through the racial category as a mental construction of modernity. According to Aníbal Quijano, European colonialism established a system of classification of racial differences to organise and rationalise political inequality and labour exploitation. The new racial imaginary introduced by the coloniser, based on a supposed biological distinction, naturalised the inferiority of Indigenous and African people, which in turn created the conditions of possibility for the emergence of new relations of domination imposed

⁷⁸Spence, 2023.

⁷⁹See <https://www.letras.mus.br/racionais-mcs/66643/>, accessed 16 April 2023.

⁸⁰See <https://www.letras.mus.br/racionais-mcs/79451/>, accessed 16 April 2023.

⁸¹Pires and Flauzina, ‘Políticas da morte’.

⁸²See https://www.rtp.pt/noticias/mundo/proposta-de-testes-de-vacinas-em-africa-classificada-de-mentalidade-colonial_n1219253, accessed 16 April 2023.

⁸³Wilderson, ‘Gramsci’s Black Marx’.

⁸⁴See Glen Coulthard, *Red Skin, White Masks: Rejecting the Colonial Politics of Recognition* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2014).

⁸⁵Fanon, *Wretched of the Earth*, p. 5.

through conquest: the exploitation of resources, the expropriation of land, and compulsory labour.⁸⁶

The pandemic aggravated this framework of intersectional inequalities because many of the jobs considered ‘essential’, which supported the lives of the ‘quarantined’, corresponded to the racialised workforce – as is the case, to a large extent, for nurses, caregivers, funeral workers, street cleaners, supermarket and pharmacy cashiers, bus and Uber drivers, and food-delivery workers, many of whom have informal contracts. In this sense, the same bodies constructed as disposable and routinely made invisible were now framed as ‘essential’ to provide ‘indispensable’ services to the population. This workforce had to risk their lives in subaltern jobs where they were subjected to strenuous working hours, lack of personal protective equipment, inadequate hygiene conditions, and precarious work contracts. Racialised capitalism has disproportionately exposed subaltern workers to the pandemic in the United States and Brazil.

In June 2020, members of the Durham Workers Assembly in North Carolina held a demonstration outside the Durham Police Headquarters in support of the Black Lives Matter movement.⁸⁷ Circulars passed the following message at the demonstration:

‘Workers in the US are currently facing two tragic pandemics. The first is the plight of essential workers, going to work every day to risk their lives amidst COVID-19, which has now resulted in the tragic deaths of over 100,000 people. The second is the reality of racism and police violence. Both disproportionately impact Black workers.’ Moreover, ‘tens of millions of workers find themselves in a condition of involuntary servitude, no effective voice in their conditions of work, their health or the security of their livelihood’.⁸⁸

In Brazil, a symptom of this involuntary servitude was that the first officially registered Covid-19 death in the country was that of domestic worker Rosana Aparecida Urbano, 57 years old, on 12 March 2020 in São Paulo. A week later, the first victim in Rio de Janeiro was another housekeeper, Cleonice Gonçalves, who had contracted the disease from the white employer for whom she had worked for twenty years. The employer lived in one of the most expensive neighbourhoods in Brazil (Alto Leblon) and had just returned from Carnival in Italy, but she did not dismiss the employee even after knowing of her own infection. In this sense, this racialised workforce, continuously produced as disposable and killable, was in fact indispensable for the functioning of quarantined cities and the maintenance of urban elites’ lifestyles.

Sixty years after his death, Fanon helps us understand the false dilemma between saving lives and saving the economy, as claimed during the pandemic by far-right politicians such as Bolsonaro and Trump. Both governments repeatedly argued, challenging scientific prescriptions and supporting the position of business leaders, that economic activities should go on even if that required the sacrifice of some lives. In 2020, at a press conference at the White House, President Trump stated: ‘Our country wasn’t built to be shut down. This is not a country that was built for this.’ He then predicted: ‘America will again and soon be open for business. Very soon. A lot sooner than three or four months that somebody was suggesting.’⁸⁹ For Trump, medical recommendations for social isolation would be more harmful to the economy and, consequently, to life than the disease itself. Likewise, President Bolsonaro stated: ‘Life comes first, but without jobs, society will face a problem as serious as a disease: poverty.’ On social networks, supporters of President

⁸⁶ Quijano, ‘Colonialidade do poder’.

⁸⁷ Don Nonini, ‘The triple-sidedness of “I can’t breathe”. The COVID-19 pandemic, enslavement, and agro-industrial capitalism’, *FOCAAL. Journal of Global and Historical Anthropology*, 89 (2021), pp. 114–29.

⁸⁸ Quoted in Nonini, ‘The triple-sidedness of “I can’t breathe”’, p. 114.

⁸⁹ For more information, see “‘Our country wasn’t built to be shut down’, says Trump”, available at: <https://www.politico.eu/article/our-country-wasnt-built-to-be-shut-down-says-trump/>, accessed 27 January 2022.

Bolsonaro shared the hashtag #OBrasilNãoPodeParar ('Brazil cannot stop'), the motto of an advertising campaign on which the Brazilian government had spent 4.8 million reais (approximately 850,000 USD).⁹⁰

Given those statements, one can ask: to which lives did Trump and Bolsonaro refer? Insofar as, within the scope of the necropolitics project outlined above, some lives are livable and others are killable, how can one speak of life in an absolute sense? And yet, if power relations that produce certain social groups as subhuman also determine hierarchies in the world of labour, how can we deal with the economy without accounting for the ways specific lives become prioritised at the expense of others?

The fight against normality that normality does not tell

The pandemic was seen as a rupture/crisis of normality, and many already foresee the adaptation of societies to the 'new normal', with new relationship patterns based on resilience and flexibility.⁹¹ However, if we recentre our reading of the world – if instead of starting from the caravels and discoveries,⁹² we begin from Abya Yala (the name coined by the indigenous Cuna in Panama to refer to the Indigenous nations of the Americas), or from the non-white populations that have historically suffered from genocides, epistemicides, and ecocides – the question that remains is: normal for whom? In its normality, the system has dehumanised and (re)produced inequalities, poverty, and death for a significant portion of the population.⁹³ The usual conditions by which society functions reproduce the subalternity of certain racially identified groups. For this portion of the population, rights – including the right to life – have always been in quarantine, suspended for over 500 years; and democratic pacts have never arrived. As Severino Ngoenha highlights, confinement, lack of medication, difficulty breathing, life-death, and the 'state of emergency' have always been the ordinary conditions of life for racialised populations.⁹⁴

On the other hand, these Indigenous and Afrodiasporic populations have historically resisted the imposed conditions of normality, creating a 'new normal' for themselves – for example, through their gathering in Maroon settlements in North America, known in Brazil as quilombos,⁹⁵ having recognised the commonality of their struggles against the brutality of the slave system.⁹⁶ As noted by Robinson, 'Maroon settlements ... had to be destroyed, or failing that, **quarantined**. They could not be allowed to contaminate a labor upon which so much depended ... Wars of repression, then, still had to be undertaken, severe discipline maintained. Even then, the masters' nightmares kept recurring and their hysterias periodically assumed epidemic proportions.'⁹⁷

⁹⁰ João Filho, 'Coronavírus: Existe uma lógica genocida por trás do falso dilema entre a economia e vidas', *The Intercept_Brasil* (29 March 2020), available at: <https://theintercept.com/2020/03/29/coronavirus-economia-vidas-logica-genocida/>, accessed 1 February 2022.

⁹¹ Marta Fernández, 'Do novo mundo ao novo normal: Quem define o novo?', *Revista África e Africanidades*, 14 (2021), pp. 58–68 (p. 63).

⁹² O. Santos Filho, 'Ultra Aequinoxialem Non Peccari: Anarquia, estado de natureza e a construção da ordem político-espacial', *Monções: Revista de Relações Internacionais da UFGD*, 8:15 (2019), pp. 486–518.

⁹³ Silvio Almeida, Djamilia Ribeiro, and Racismo Estrutural, 2020, available at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ZADKtsNnx74>, accessed 29 March 2021.

⁹⁴ Severino Ngoenha, Ubu-Ntu: Filosofia e Ética, streamed, 2020, available at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8G9rB388HEg>, accessed 29 March 2021.

⁹⁵ The Jacarezinho favela was born as an urban quilombo inhabited by enslaved Black people who escaped from nearby farms. See 'Jacarezinho: Favela palco de massacre nasceu como quilombo, lutou contra a ditadura e hoje é refém da violência', available at: <https://www.bbc.com/portuguese/brasil-57208131>, accessed 1 February 2022.

⁹⁶ Cedric Robinson, *Black Marxism: The Making of the Black Radical Tradition* (Durham: University of North Carolina Press, 2000).

⁹⁷ Robinson, *Black Marxism*, p. 178, our emphasis.

If international relations are forged by a systemic inequality that excludes two-thirds of humanity from its contours,⁹⁸ their conditions of normality rely on continuous efforts by political, economic, and intellectual elites to maintain and discipline 'colour lines'. After all, maintaining normality means reproducing the unequal distribution of material, symbolic, cultural, and political resources across the globe for the privilege of a few. Quarantine, confinement, surveillance, precarious work and living conditions, as well as intersectional inequalities connecting oppressions of race, class, territory, and gender, among others, are the normal conditions for a large part of the world's population, which have been (re-)existing locally and transnationally for over 500 years.

In Rio de Janeiro, protesters gathered on 31 May 2020 for an act in defence of Black lives, amidst a wave of protests in the United States over the assassination of George Floyd. At the protest, they carried posters that read, in Portuguese, 'Black lives matter' and 'Stop killing us' and called for an end to the genocide of Black youth, a genocide that was exemplified by the shooting of 14-year-old João Pedro inside his home during a police operation in Rio de Janeiro's favela Complexo do Salgueiro in May 2020. In a live broadcast of the demonstration, activist Raull Santiago, from another favela, Complexo do Alemão, stated that they were there to 'try to survive the virus without having to dodge police shootings, without having to carry the bodies of our brothers and sisters.'⁹⁹

Ana Paula Oliveira, a co-founder of a movement formed by the mothers of Manguinhos, whose children were killed by the state, declared about the act:

This movement in the US was significant because it seems that only what happens outside Brazil raises awareness. Their compelling, powerful demonstrations gave greater visibility than what happens in other countries, such as Brazil. Racism is not an isolated case of one country. Many people around the world die because of the color of their skin and the place where they live.

The activist also said: 'It is very suffocating to see this violence repeating itself, people being killed in their homes, police operations, all kinds of abuse by the state that should guarantee our rights, including the right to stay home.'¹⁰⁰

The transnational character of protests in defence of Black lives has shed light on the transnational and intersectional matrix of domination that globally affects a Black diaspora that, despite its heterogeneity, shares a legacy of slavery, colonialism, and imperialism.¹⁰¹ Floyd's anguished call to his mother has echoed beyond US borders towards the mothers of Black boys and men in Brazil and other countries, revealing the interconnectedness between their mourning and struggles. Débora Maria da Silva, a founder of the Mothers of May movement, which fights for the memory of their children murdered by the police in 2006, was invited four years ago to share her experience with movements and organisations in the United States, including Black Lives Matter. About this experience, the activist said: 'When we were with a commission from the US Senate, we saw that there is a struggle there that is similar to the Brazilian one. Afterward, I attended a meeting at a college with people from other Latin American countries, and we noticed the similarities in police violence.' For Débora, because of these similarities, especially concerning police violence against Black and poor people, it is necessary to 'unify and internationalize' the struggles. According to Débora, 'it is a system that sees the Black man as the enemy'.¹⁰²

⁹⁸ Alina Sajed, 'Postcolonialism', in Richard Devetak and Jacqui True (eds), *Theories of International Relations* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2022), pp. 60–76.

⁹⁹ For more information, see {<https://www.cnnbrasil.com.br/nacional/ato-reune-manifestantes-em-defesa-de-vidasNegras-no-rio-de-janeiro/>}, accessed 27 January 2022.

¹⁰⁰ For more information, see {<https://www.humanasrede.com/post/a-nossa-luta-aumentou-na-pandemia>}, accessed 27 January 2022.

¹⁰¹ Collins, *Pensamento*.

¹⁰² Available at: {<https://noticias.r7.com/sao-paulo/maes-brasileiras-ajudam-a-inspirar-movimento-antirracista-nos-eua-28062022>}, accessed 27 January 2022.

As argued by Lélia Gonzalez, the anonymous Black woman, living in the periphery, providing services for a living, and supporting her family practically alone, is precisely who is affected the most by this racist structure – especially as her sons and brothers are the object of systematic police persecution and constitute most of the incarcerated population in Brazil.¹⁰³

In this sense, although intersectional oppressions in the United States and Brazil carry specific historical forms, in both states, the (re)production of the nation excludes from its limits the Black children who are seen as dangerous even before they are born.¹⁰⁴ In 2007, former governor of Rio de Janeiro Sérgio Cabral claimed:

I am in favor of a woman's right to terminate an unwanted pregnancy. I am a Christian, a Catholic, but what vision is this? These delays are very serious. I don't see the political class discussing this. I get very distressed. It's all about violence. You see the number of children per mother in Lagoa Rodrigo de Freitas, Tijuca, Méier, and Copacabana, it is a Swedish standard. Now, if you pick up Rocinha, the standard is Zambia, Gabon. That is a factory of thugs. The state can't handle it. There's no supply from the public [health] network so that these girls can terminate their pregnancy.¹⁰⁵

With these words, Cabral explicitly revealed the unequal distribution of the value of lives across the city of Rio de Janeiro: while the 'legitimate' children of the nation should have their lives preserved in wealthy areas of the city, in the Rocinha favela its 'illegitimate' children should be aborted. In this sense, while the white woman's body, constructed in the dialectic of good versus evil, of Mary versus Eve, is saved by motherhood, the absence of such representation for the Black woman ends up fixing her in a place of unredeemed evil.¹⁰⁶

In the governor's speech, the hierarchy between lives that should be lived in the city's wealthy neighbourhoods and those that can be killed at the peripheries is compared to international hierarchical dynamics (Sweden versus Zambia and Gabon). By looking at the international from the peripheries, from the 'zones of non-being', from the eyes of victims of the US racial system, we can widen our field of vision beyond and against the narrow ontology of International Relations that, based on a set of foundational dichotomies – domestic/international, peace/war, police/army, politics/economy – invisibilises a multiplicity of contemporary forms of violence. This recentring allows us to look at world order through structural, relational, and historical lenses, making visible the violence of 'colour lines' that constitute the inter/national and its imbrication with capitalism.

Thus, we end with the question: who defines the 'new normal'? As long as the various crossed, intersectional pandemics are not simultaneously faced, normality grounded in inequality will continue to be pursued at all costs. After all, it has been ensuring, for more than 500 years, the reproduction of privileges of economically and racially dominant groups. The 'new' will only be another adaptation, an accommodation of the old normal to the new conditions imposed by the pandemic – thereby updating the links highlighted by Fanon between colonial violence, racism, and economic exploitation.

Concluding remarks

In this article, we argue that, for racialised segments of the population, normality has always coexisted with police brutality and with the logic of war against their territories. However, this logic of

¹⁰³Gonzalez, 'Racismo e sexismo', p. 231.

¹⁰⁴Vinicius Santiago and Marta Fernández, 'From the backstage of war: The struggle of mothers in the favelas of Rio de Janeiro', *Contexto Internacional*, 39 (2017), pp. 35–52.

¹⁰⁵Available at: {<https://g1.globo.com/Noticias/Politica/0,,MUL155710-5601,00-CABRAL+DEFENDE+ABORTO+CONTRA+VIOLENCIA+NO+RIO+DE+JANEIRO.html>}, accessed 7 February 2022.

¹⁰⁶Conceição Evaristo, 'Gênero e etnia: Uma escre(vivência) de dupla face', in Nadilza M. de Barros Moreira and Liane Schneider (eds), *Mulheres no mundo: Etnia, marginalidade, diáspora* (João Pessoa: Idéia/Editora Universitária – UFPB, 2005), pp. 201–12.

permanent war against racialised segments, whether in Brazil, in the US, or around the world, is concealed by the silent pact of whiteness¹⁰⁷ that structures the knowledge and institutions of the modern/colonial world, such as the nation-state.

As we have seen, the body-territory of the Black subject of Brazil and the United States is the first target of colonial attacks¹⁰⁸ that racialise, dehumanise, and objectify it.¹⁰⁹ In line with Afro-pessimism, Black people in both countries are subject to the ‘afterlife of slavery’ and, as such, to a series of mechanisms that only update those found in slave plantations, as is the case of persecution, surveillance, incarceration, and death.¹¹⁰ As Vargas puts it: ‘The undeniable fact is that Black people are dying, are suffering, are being incarcerated and monitored in unprecedented numbers.’¹¹¹

This article claims that the ‘colour line’ identified by Du Bois continues to racially categorise and rank humanity in the 21st century. However, the persistent efforts to keep them in place continue to be made invisible by dominant theories of IR, as they insist on looking at the world from the fantasy of a self-centred history that relegates two-thirds of humanity to irrelevance.¹¹²

Based on the idea of crossed pandemics, we demonstrate that in order to understand the exposure of racialised segments of the Brazilian and US populations to death, one must approach the pandemic from the multiple dimensions of the colour line – geographical, economic, political, and social.¹¹³

We conclude by drawing attention to the historical struggles through which populations have faced normalised intersectional inequalities. We exemplify these struggles with the movement of mothers whose sons have been executed by state forces, and women who routinely experience different dimensions of oppression – racism, sexism, and classism – in a combined and simultaneous way.

For these reasons, it is essential for the discipline of International Relations to be open to other histories and analytical sensitivities that lead us beyond the Hall of Mirrors at Versailles, where the Western elite has been trained for self-reference, self-contemplation, self-evaluation, and for the construction of their own narcissistic histories.

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¹⁰⁷ Maria Aparecida Bento, ‘Branqueamento e branquitude no Brasil’, in Iray Carone and Maria Aparecida (eds), *Psicologia social do racismo: Estudos sobre branquitude e branqueamento no Brasil* (Petrópolis: Vozes, 2002), pp. 25–58.

¹⁰⁸ Luiz Rufino, ‘Performances afro-diaspóricas e decolonialidade: O saber corporal a partir de Exu e suas encruzilhadas’, *Antropolítica – Revista Contemporânea de Antropologia*, 40 (2016), pp. 54–80; Fernández, ‘Do novo mundo’.

¹⁰⁹ Aimé Césaire, *Discourse on Colonialism* (New York: Monthly Review Press, 2000).

¹¹⁰ Saidiya Hartman, *Scenes of Subjection: Terror, Slavery, and Self-Making in Nineteenth-Century America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997); F. B. Wilderson, III, *Incognegro: A Memoir of Exile and Apartheid* (Boston: South End Press, 2008).

¹¹¹ Vargas, ‘A Diáspora Negra’, p. 52.

¹¹² Sajed, ‘Postcolonialism’.

¹¹³ A. Anievas, N. Manchanda, and R. Shilliam, ‘Confronting the global colour line: An introduction’, in Anievas et al. (eds), *Race and Racism*, pp. 1–16.

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