

Black Lives Matter Otherwise All Lives Do Not Matter

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Abstract

Long before three African American women registered the twitter handle, #BlackLivesMatter, and started sending out tweets that helped to mobilize the spontaneous outrage against the impunity that followed the killings of unarmed black people by police officers and by vigilante in the US, there was always a rich history of resistance against criminal justice oppression by people of African descent and their allies. Apologists for white supremacist violence tend to reject the truism that Black Lives Matter by countering with All Lives Matter as if the later could hold if the former is rejected. In other words, since All Lives Matter, it follows that Black Lives Matter too and if by any logic Black Lives do not Matter, then All Lives do not Matter. The reason why it is even necessary to state what should be obvious, that Black Lives Matter, is exactly because there are still people who believe that certain lives belong to the homo sacer and are disposable to be taken without any consequences. This editorial complicates this issue by demonstrating the theory of Martin Luther King Jr. that injustice anywhere is a threat to justice everywhere. By treating Black Lives as if they do not Matter, the lives of human beings everywhere are threatened and so all should rally in support of Black Lives in the interest of humanity. It is not an act of charity when others support Black Lives Matter.

Problematization of shared curses

Human life originated in Africa and so any Oedipal complex that wishes to destroy African lives is a direct threat to all human lives. Supremacist thinking has to end in order for humanity to thrive. Africans do not claim to be superior to any other group and so the problem of supremacy is a problem for those who invest in such an ideology to divest from it and return to the love of humanity under Ubuntu or Mbari which Martin Luther king Jr. referred to as the World House that was bequeathed to descendants by a great writer and it is up to the descendants to share the house in peace or fight and kill each other or burn the house down: I am because we are all human. Whenever any group of human beings feels superior to others, the result tends to be a will to commit genocide against those who are supposedly less human. Once genocidal policies are implemented, they do not consume only the targeted groups because, according to an old African saying, the rain does not fall on one man's housetop. Contrary to the assumption that Black Lives Matter is a special interest campaign that benefits only Black people, it is obvious that the whole of humanity will benefit by supporting the campaign which says unapologetically that Black Lives Matter and the whole of humanity will pay

the price for opposing such a campaign. Let us explore this hypothesis with evidence from history.

If we look back to the trans-Atlantic slavery that continued for four hundred years against the people of African descent, many will be forgiven for thinking that it affected only Africans adversely. Yet wage workers were treated as wage slaves for as long as chattel slavery continued and the campaign for the 40-hour week was not won by workers until the abolition of slavery. Prior to that, workers were worked to death on their feet as disposable bits of wood until chattel slavery ended. The campaign against slavery was not waged exclusively by people of African descent but by abolitionists of all colors who knew that slavery was a threat to the whole of humanity. For instance, the white men who raped African women to make babies for sale were engaged in the human trafficking of their own flesh and blood and so were demoralizing their own humanity. Furthermore, the enslaved did not take their oppression lying down but rebelled continuously and sometimes took the lives of their oppressors in large numbers as the Haitian revolutionaries did in self-defense and for self-determination, according to C.L.R. James (1938), *The Black Jacobins*.

The fear of insurrection, according to W.E.B. Du Bois (1906) in *The Suppression of the African Slave Trade*, was the main motivation why the further importation of Africans to be enslaved in the US was prohibited by law right from the 17th century onwards. However, there were also many who opposed the slave trade on moral grounds as part of the propaganda against England during the revolutionary war with assertions by even enslavers that all men were created equal. Eventually, Britain was forced to abolish the slave trade after the revolutionary war partly to cripple the US economy that was based on slave labor. When abolitionists managed to persuade the British government to end slavery as a state policy, compensation was paid to enslavers but not to the enslaved. The abolition of slavery did not benefit only the enslaved.

When the US could no longer continue with the hypocrisy of being a democracy with slavery supported by law that demanded the return of people who escaped from slavery, the southern states wanted to defeat the northern states militarily to enforce slavery throughout the US as state policy under the pretense of state rights. The northern states wanted to end slavery throughout the union in order to expand industrialization and the market profitability of capitalism. If they had come to a gentlemanly agreement that slavery was a threat to all, there would have been no civil war in the US and therefore the more than 600,000 lives that were lost could have been spared. The majority of the white people who died in the civil war were poor and did not enslave anyone but benefited from the white privilege of having certain jobs and certain houses or public spaces reserved for white people only. If all poor white people had recognized their common humanity with enslaved Africans and refused to fight for the confederacy, there would have been no civil war just as there would have been no revolutionary war if the poor working class British troops had refused to fight and die for king and country that did not care

about them. So, John Brown's body lay smoldering in his grave while his troops went marching on.

At the end of the civil war, if the poor whites had joined forces with the Africans who were previously enslaved to elect government officials who were opposed to mass poverty, they could have voted more funds for the support of public schools, libraries, swimming pools, roads and railway lines, public housing and hospitals for the benefit of all. Instead, the ideology of white supremacy was used to divide the poor to the extent that even white trade unions did not allow black workers to join and poor whites burnt black schools or lynched black people who wanted to vote. The result was that the rich white men consolidated their domination of the country to the disadvantage of the poor who tended to end up in prison while the rich got richer as Jeffrey Reiman and Paul Leighton (2010) put it in *The Rich Get Richer and the Poor Get Prison*. In every country, the vast majority of prisoners, about 99% in most cases, happen to be poor people who could not afford to hire dream teams to defend them and were forced to plead guilty even when they were innocent and irrespective of their racial or gender backgrounds. This confirms one of the forgotten theories of Martin Luther King Jr. in the 'I Have a Dream Speech': We will go to jail together!

Mass incarceration as *The New Jim Crow*, according to Michelle Alexander (2010), is a cause that calls for racial justice in support of the dignity of African Americans, Hispanics and American Indian Natives. But it is not just racial justice that is involved: it is always race-class-gender justice in accordance with the theory of articulation by Stuart Hall (1980; 2016) or intersectionality by Kimberle Crenshaw (1989), among others. The differences between articulation and intersectionality include the fact that intersectionality does not reference articulation but Hall actually mentioned that oppression is 'intersectional' in the 1980 publication that predated the publication of the theory of intersectionality in the US. Moreover, whereas intersectionality is a race-class-gender critique of the inadequacies of the critical legal studies movement that was blind to racism and sexism, the adoption of the term critical race theory was mimicking critical legal theory to the extent that the class and gender aspects were relatively obscured whereas the theory of articulation that emerged from the critique of apartheid South Africa remained attentive to race-class-gender dominance and the need for the articulation of coalitions in the resistance to domination. Furthermore, whereas CRT assumes that intersectionality disadvantages only racial minorities, articulation theory is aware that the authoritarian populism that emerges from white supremacy in a capitalist society also harms the majority of working class white people in spite of their white privileges. White supremacy and authoritarian populism sustain hegemony simply because of the failure of scholar-activists to articulate an alternative progressive populism that will mobilize poor men and women, black and white and progressive intellectuals to defeat rightwing authoritarian populism democratically. A focus on racial justice is also fruitful on its own as Gabbidon (2010) and Kalunta-Crumpton (2012) among others have shown.

Otherwise, rich white men will continue to monger for profitable wars in which poor workers will be sent to kill poor people in other countries and to be killed or maimed in large numbers and largely abandoned to their own devices when they return from foreign wars, causing many to remain angry, violent and suicidal to the disadvantage of all. Hal Pepinsky (1991) offers the theory of *The Geometry of Violence* which states that the more war is chosen as a preferred option abroad, the more war is waged at home by the state and by private individuals who resort to violence as a way of expressing grudges or settling disputes. The countries with the highest rates of homicide and suicide are also the countries with current or recent histories of militarism. It was not only black South Africans who paid the price for the crimes of apartheid given that the poor whites also paid dearly especially after they invaded Angola and were cut off by Cuban forces while being encircled by the Angolan forces in alliance with SWAPO and Umkhonto We Sizwe, forcing them to surrender and sue for peace with an agreement to withdraw from Namibia and scaring the poor Boers enough to begin to refuse conscription into the SADF. After apartheid was negotiated to death by Mandela, the violent crime rates remained high and affected all in South Africa, including white farmers who retained the land that was seized from Black Africans. Russia and the former Soviet republics also experienced high murder rates perhaps because of the impact of the invasion of Afghanistan that militarized hundreds of thousands of their youth while the many foreign wars of the US have a similar effect on high violent crime rates.

The NAZI party was able to mobilize Germans against communists and Jews in Europe as part of the struggle for more colonies in Africa. Italians joined the axis of evil due to their own greed for colonies in Africa and Japan joined the imperialist scramble in the bid to seize colonies in Asia and the pacific. As a result, an estimated 60 million people died in imperialist tribal World War II fighting for imperialist domination and for white supremacy. If all the working people of the world had united and rejected imperialism and refused to be conscripted to fight the working people of other countries, the 1% that make up the bourgeoisie could not have sustained mass killing for four years. Black Lives Matter in Africa and the scramble to deny the humanity of Africans by seeking to colonize them with what Onyeozili (2004) theorized as 'gunboat criminology' was what led to the carnage of the first imperialist tribal war as well. Those savage wars did not affect only Africans adversely.

Furthermore, male superiority ideologies affect men adversely and not only women contrary to the campaigns of western feminists. In every country of the world there is violence against women but the violence against men is even more profound. In the struggle for male superiority, men fight and kill other men because someone looked at 'their' women a certain way just as the Greeks went to war against Troy because someone's wife ran away with another man. Some men kill themselves if they cannot measure up to the ideology of male supremacy. Masculinity seeks hegemony over men as well and not only over women by encouraging more men to volunteer for the armed forces and go ahead to die for their country when the poor really do not have any country and when the rich owners of the country rarely want to die for it. If men knew that hegemonic

masculinity also hurts masses of men, more men would be in support of Africana Womanism or the theory that men and women should be allies in the struggle against white supremacist imperialist patriarchy as bell hooks would put it, though hooks rarely extends her activism to men and women in Africa and she identifies as a feminist rather than as an Africana womanist.

The tricky question is the class question: Does the oppression of the poor also affect the rich adversely? This does not seem to be the case given that racism and sexism have at least been formally outlawed while class discrimination and exploitation remain legal. Yet, when the revolution comes, the rich people will not be able to catch it on their flat screen televisions because the revolution will not be televised, said Gil Scott Heron. Apart from the impact on all by a probable revolution of the poor in uprisings, the oppression of the poor by the rich also affects the rich. If the poor are paid wages that they could not live on, some may resort to predatory lifestyles that would not always spare the rich though the rich may live in gated communities relatively secure from burglaries and burglars may mainly prey on other poor people in their neighborhoods. The bigger threat to the rich is that when the poor are neglected and they become disease-ridden, the rich will not be spared because viruses tend to be equal opportunities invaders though the rich may have more resources to treat their infections while the poor die like flies. But if all the poor die, who would work in the factories of the rich and if the poor survive and go to work but are not paid enough, how would they go to the gaudy supermarkets or go online to party like rock stars? Ifeanyi Ezeonu (2018) theorizes these harms from a *Market Criminology* perspective but he presents it as if it is only the poor who suffer such crimes whereas the rich white men he focused on may share some of the costs of superiorism.

The point being made is that the abolition of slavery and the payment of wages, no matter how meager, to millions of people for the first time in US history resulted in a boost to the demand for goods that launched the US into the gilded age of capitalism whereas the economy slumbered for hundreds of years under chattel slavery and despite the huge profits accumulated by private planters. Similarly, the allowance of women to work outside the home and the granting of the right to vote to women also increased the purchasing power of families to the extent that equal pay for equal work will be to the advantage of men too and not just to women, as President Obama observed while signing the relevant law on his first day in office; though his administration was then hijacked by neo-cons to wage war on parts of Africa and the Arab world to his subsequent regret.

Another tricky question is what Baudrillard called 'the accursed share theorem' – the assumption that oppression and exclusion harm all and not only those excluded or eliminated. According to him, if difference is finally eliminated and everything looks the same, such a tyranny of sameness would spell the doom of life in a world that thrives on biodiversity and among human beings who cannot do without cultural and gender diversity. How does this theorem apply to indigenous people who were almost completely wiped out by white supremacist

conquistadores? How did the conquerors share in the curse of sameness when it could be argued that they took everything for their own benefit while the victimized were forced to share the curse alone?

To answer this question, we may imagine a curse of Pocahontas against the genocidal conquerors of her people. Imagine that every time grandpa brings out his tobacco pipe at the Thanksgiving dinner and lights up, an invisible hologram of Pocahontas rises with the smoke with a sickle in her hand and starts slashing at the necks of everyone breathing in the smoke. Tobacco was a sacred smoke for the American Indian Natives but greedy Europeans commercialized it by killing the original owners and seizing their land to grow more with slave labor. Perhaps the owners cursed anyone who abused the sacred smoke and today six million people are estimated to die from tobacco-related diseases every year across the world. The problem of the accursed share is that it does not affect only the conquerors but everyone who is exposed to the abused smoke is expected to share the curse and the world is only slowly recognizing this by banning smoking in public places while many more are giving up smoking.

A similar curse can be imagined as the curse of Oluada Ekwuonu (Voiceless Unheard, Olaudah Equiano), the young Igbo boy who was kidnapped with his sister and sold into slavery to help grow a worthless crop for sweetening the biscuits, bread, wine, soda, beer, tea and coffee of the master race. Imagine that he placed a curse on sugar and that every time people indulge the sweet teeth, the ghosts of the enslaved appear to strangle them and to give them diabetes which is known to kill millions of people around the world every year. The accursed share hypothesis implies that not only the enslavers pay the prize for the fruits of slave labor but even the descendants of the enslaved have acquired the sweet teeth for the fruits of the labor of their ancestors. As the Igbo would say, no one is spared as the friend of death. Tobacco and sugar may still have been produced and consumed around the world but slavery and settler colonialism ensured that they would be commercialized on large scales to get more people hooked. The point here is that it is not the indigenous people who were killed to seize their land for commercial growing of tobacco and sugarcanes and the enslaved Africans who were forced to grow the accursed crops in chains and not by choice that were the only ones who suffered from the curse. The aggressors also paid the price for their inordinate greed.

All Lives Do Not Matter if Some Do Not Matter

More specifically on the #BlackLivesMatter campaign, it is known that the police disproportionately target black people for unlawful killing. This is true because black people are killed out of proportion in terms of their size in the general population. What is not known very well is that the police also kill a lot more white people than black people in the US. For every black person killed by the police in the US, more than two white people are killed by the police every year, according to records kept online by *The Guardian* newspaper in London, UK. If this was

better known, more white people would join the Black Lives Matter campaign on the ground that all lives will not matter until Black lives matter. A similar point can be made about settler-colonial locations where indigenous people are over-represented in mass incarceration. For instance, indigenous Australians are known as the most incarcerated group of people in the world in terms of rates but their overall proportion among prisoners is about 27%. This means that over 70% of prisoners in Australia are poor whites and if poor whites knew this, they would rally in support of indigenous policies in the criminal justice system and bring about the decolonization of the law to allow more human freedom and end punitive laws especially for victimless crimes like marijuana possession for which lots of indigenous people and poor whites get arrested though the curse of the oppression is not shared equally.

There is moral indignation when African American men are arrested for entering a coffee shop and asking to use the toilet before a business meeting. When unarmed African Americans are killed by the police whereas white men known to have committed mass murder are arrested alive, it is understandable why Black Lives Matter is led by African Americans with the support of many white liberals. Sports players have taken to kneeling in protest over this rather than stand for the National Anthem but many of those who have shown no outrage over police killings, say that they are outraged that players protest against unlawful killings by law enforcement officers who are paid to protect the public. However, police officers also get targeted and killed by members of the public but the professionalism of the police demands that they should be trained to make arrests without lethal force especially when suspects are not armed.

The protest against brutality targeting people of African descent is not owned by #BlackLivesMatter the way social media incorporation would suggest with assumptions of copyrights ownership over a twitter handle that yield revenues from foundations and donors and attract fee-based speaker invitations, awards and honors that are not shared with the wider community. Already, some local BLM chapters have broken off from the national body and adopted more radical agendas due to lack of satisfaction with the corporate strategies of the national leaders who were not elected and were not accountable to the local communities but tended to benefit from the publicity around local incidents without staying with the local people to sustain the resistance against brutality. Part of the short-coming of the BLM is that the indignation against racism is not adequately articulated or intersected with the struggle against class oppression and sexism in such a way that coalitions of struggles could be formed nationally and globally against all systems of oppression and not only against anti-black racism.

Concluding Discussions

It is because Black Lives Matter that some activists have extended the declaration to state that African Lives Matter; Asian Lives Matter; Arab Lives Matter;

Indigenous Lives Matter, Poor Lives Matter, Women's Lives Matter, etc. Given the intense terrorism that has spread throughout Africa as a result of what Ekwe-Ekwe (2006) calls the genocidist states that imperialism imposed on post-colonial Africa, there is no doubt that Black Lives Matter. As in the US, the mass brutality in Africa spills over into Europe occasionally and is not orchestrated only by the state but also by anti-social movements of militants that are also loosely linked with state forces in Africa and to imperialist sections of the global community as I argued in the essay: 'The Ire of Satire Meets the Error of Terror' (Agozino, 2015); and as Onwudiwe (2004) indicated in *The Globalization of Terrorism*. The articulation of different but intersectional struggles in Africa demands popular education on the fact that it is not only the groups targeted with terroristic violence that suffer given that the constituencies of the aggressors also suffer the consequences of neocolonial authoritarianism especially in racially homogenous African societies where the aggressors and the victimized appear racially identical, though ethnicity may differ. When poor men and women in Africa realize that what is found in the home of the rat is also found in the home of the lizard, they will more likely unite to build the people's republic of Africa and erase the colonial boundaries that keep the people divided and internally weakened enough to force masses of African youth to drown in the Mediterranean trying to access fortress Europe to be re-enslaved rather than endure the slow but steady suffocation guaranteed in the motherland by neocolonialism.

Mumia Abu-Jamal and Stephen Vittoria (2018) present a haunting text on *Murder Incorporated: Empire, Genocide and Manifest Destiny*, the first book of their trilogy on *Dreaming of Empire*. They write with wit and merciless critique of the violence that has been cloaked as liberal God-fearing manifest destiny in the history of the US. This is a welcome contribution to the search for an end to oppression in any form with emphasis on the fate of American Indian Natives, enslaved Africans, colonized Mexicans and imperialist mass murder in South America. The short-coming of the book is that the beneficiaries of the US empire come across too easily as Europe whereas the poor Europeans and poor white Americans have also paid a stiff price for the imperialist hubris of their ruling classes. Chris Cunneen and Juan Tauri (2016) offer a similar groundbreaking text on *Indigenous Criminology* with a focus on Aboriginal Australians and the Maori who are over-represented in the criminal justice system. They are also an example of the collaboration between a scholar of European descent and an indigenous scholar and they too could have pointed out to poor whites who feel superior that the rain that is beating indigenous peoples also storm on poor whites to a great extent but not to the same extent.

I suggest that what Vivien Saleh-Hannah (2015) has been pursuing as the 'hauntology' against oppression will be more successful if all the oppressed are united in the struggle instead of isolating Africans and Hispanics as the ones who would salvage the situation. In all the struggles that people of African descent have waged, they have always had allies who are not people of African descent just as Mumia's co-author and many of the supporting authors in their book are of European descent. We should always cultivate such collaborations and alliances

especially because when people of African descent win, everyone shares the blessings just as everyone shares in the curses that haunt humanity under white supremacist imperialist patriarchy. As Feagin, Hernan and Ducey (2014) convincingly argued, scholar-activists should be more inclusive and diverse in the literature that they cite to support their call for a *Liberation Sociology* that goes beyond Public Sociology and quantification. Oriola (2006; 2012), Kitossa (2012) and Tauri and Deckert (2014) among others, explicitly called for the adoption of the counter-colonial decolonization paradigm in criminology (Agozino, 2003) with many more answering the call affirmatively around the world.

The articles in every issue of our journal are centered on people of African descent but the problems being raised consistently in the journal apply to the whole of humanity. The articles may directly or indirectly contribute to the decolonization of criminology by challenging the oppressive imperialist reason that dominates the field as a field that was designed for the control of others, including the poor Europeans as others (Agozino, 2003). We hope that the contributions to the journal would help to shape the development of criminology as a discipline in the former colonized locations but with an awareness of the need to go beyond the control-freak paradigm in colonialist criminology. Unfortunately, many of the indigenous criminologists adhere to the paradigms of Eurocentric criminology too uncritically but we hope that the open platform for the exchange of ideas by and about African peoples would lead to the liberation of not just African criminology but of criminology in general from the traps of imperialist reason.

This editorial suggests that even scholars of European descent such as Stephen Pfohl (2015) who provided the powerful foreword to my own book and testifies that some white scholars say that they find my perspective ‘unnerving’ will help to attract more white pro-working class anti-racist and anti-sexist intellectuals to rebel against white supremacy and join in the ongoing struggles to liberate the entire world from all forms of oppression while also revolutionizing theory and policy. It is not only indigenous and liberation scholars who suffer when their scholarship is marginalized, colonized or looted without credits through imperialist ‘epistemicide’ (Santos, 2014), the whole discipline tends to pay by lagging instead of leaping ahead in the pursuit of social justice. We must not reject objectivity nor should we reject commitment to social justice, rather we should combine both in the best traditions of the social science through an approach that I have theorized as committed objectivity (Agozino, 2003).

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