

FORUM

# Introduction: Racialised violence in global politics

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The 2020 murder of George Floyd put the question of racialised violence at the forefront of thinking about contemporary politics. In recent years, international politics has begun the task of acknowledging the colonial legacies that underpin global politics as well as the urgent work of decolonising its own thinking, knowledge production, and research agendas.<sup>1</sup> Decolonial research has delineated the exploitation, inequality, and discrimination that are the legacy of colonialism. It has traced the way oppression is not simply political or economic, but also epistemological.<sup>2</sup> Despite this important work, decoloniality has often been pitched in a cultural, economic, or epistemological register. This has left the question of the racialisation of political violence – killing, torture, and other acts of cruelty – under-represented. It is clear however that killing and cruelty are a constitutive aspect of the racial dynamics of genocide, war, policing, and (counter-)insurgency.<sup>3</sup> Recognising the importance of such violence goes hand in hand with work that recognises the constitutive – as opposed to merely epiphenomenal – role of violence.<sup>4</sup> We cannot understand police killing as simply the product of racism; rather – as has been demonstrated in relation to the racial dynamics of genocide – it is constitutive of racial hierarchies and their brutal consequences.<sup>5</sup>

In June 2021 we gathered a group of scholars – Shiera el-Malik (DePaul University), Ben Meiches (University of Washington Tacoma), Lester Spence (Johns Hopkins University), Marta Fernández (Pontifical Catholic University of Rio de Janeiro), Melody Fonseca (University of Puerto Rico at Rio Piedras), and Kim Wagner (Queen Mary University of London) – for a discussion of this theme at the annual British International Studies Association Conference (held online due to ongoing Covid restrictions). This conversation was continued in a series of online workshops in October and November 2021, where Himadeep Muppidi (Vassar College) and Pedro Paulo dos Santos da Silva (Pontifical Catholic University of Rio de Janeiro) joined the discussion. This forum is the outcome of these sustained conversations, held in the year after Floyd's murder.

<sup>1</sup>Alex Anievas, Nivi Manchanda, and Robbie Shilliam (eds), *Race and Racism in International Relations: Confronting the Global Colour Line* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2014).

<sup>2</sup>Nivi Manchanda, *Imagining Afghanistan: The History and Politics of Imperial Knowledge* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2020); Walter D. Mignolo, 'DELINKING: The rhetoric of modernity, the logic of coloniality and the grammar of decoloniality', *Cultural Studies*, 21:2–3 (2007), pp. 449–514; Tarak Barkawi, 'Decolonising war', *European Journal of International Security*, 1:2 (2016), pp. 199–214; David Blaney and Arlene Tickner, 'Worlding, ontological politics and the possibility of a decolonial IR', *Millennium*, 45:3 (2017), pp. 293–311; Branwen Gruffydd Jones (ed.), *Decolonizing International Relations* (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2006).

<sup>3</sup>Frank B. Wilderson III, *Afropessimism* (New York: Liveright Publishing, 2020).

<sup>4</sup>Max Bergholz, *Violence as a Generative Force: Identity, Nationalism, and Memory in a Balkan Community* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2016); Frantz Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth* (New York: Grove Press, 2004); Alexander D. Barder, *Global Race War: International Politics and Racial Hierarchy* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2021).

<sup>5</sup>Scott Straus, *The Order of Genocide* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2006).

This forum looks at the constitutivity of violence in racial orders in global politics. It also asks what we learn about the task of decolonisation once killing and cruelty are foregrounded in the study of race and racialisation in global politics. The forum starts with Shiera el-Malik's letter to her father, which not only outlines some key questions about how we might approach the violence of racial orders but also inverts traditional academic practices – foregrounding the interactions that are constitutive of thought and moving the citationary practices to the footnotes. Such an inversion constitutes an important acknowledgement of the debt to encounter and exchange that all thought has and thus opens important questions around decolonisation (where it is precisely the debts to violent interactions with silenced, marginalised, and/or minoritised knowledges that need to be acknowledged). Himadeep Muppidi follows with a discussion of the way in which violence is intertwined with the production of racial alterity (the 'mass' of 'mass destruction'). In his discussion of the atomic bombing of Hiroshima and Nagasaki, he outlines the way in which such destruction is only possible insofar as its victims are constituted as an undifferentiated and racially other mass. He shows how from this treatment of the other as an 'uncomplicated' mass, hierarchies or racial orders emerge that permit the destruction of vast numbers of lives.

Ben Meiches examines the cultural imaginaries of nuclear destruction in white supremacy and extends the discussion of the way in which such violence generates genocidal fantasies of eliminating racial others. Meiches shows the way in which violence and racialisation are always already imbricated in nuclear imaginaries. At a time when Russian nuclear threats are underpinned by Putin's imperialist imagination of Ukraine, this account of the cultural relation between race, violence, and fantasies of genocide becomes very timely. Marta Fernández and Pedro Paulo dos Santos da Silva examine the way in which police killings of Black Americans and Brazilians expose the global dynamics of anti-Blackness. Importantly, they note the way in which this is not simply a matter of comparing state-based systems of discrimination, but rather of recognising a global colour line delineated by anti-Black violence. Here, they demonstrate the way in which this colour line is inseparable from – in fact is delineated by – police violence. Finally, Lester Spence examines the way in which Black Lives Matter (BLM) activism spread globally after the killing of George Floyd. He outlines the way in which the global export of US Black popular culture – especially rap – established a vernacular cultural horizon which provided fertile ground for the proliferation of BLM protests around the world. The narration of police brutality and the violent minoritisation of Black populations in rap established a cultural grammar for articulating similar struggles – for example in the banlieues of Paris – into a global BLM movement.

Taken together, this forum constitutes an important contribution to thinking about the ineluctable violence constitutive of the racial orders of global politics. Indeed, this forum suggests that in order to understand racial orders we should foreground the violences that create and sustain them. These violences are never simply epistemological (though the deepest and most stubbornly persistent traces of such orders might be found in that register). Rather, the hierarchies and exclusions that characterise such orders are created and sustained by the ways in which the minoritised are framed as uncomplicated masses against which killing and cruelty can be practised on a global scale.

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