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Racism, Political Violence, and Afro-Diasporic Liberation Practices

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Anti-black racism inherent to colonial modernity emerged within the framework of the slave trade carried out by the imperial metropolises between Europe, Africa, and America (James, [1938] 2003; Williams, [1944] 2011 and [1979] 2010), but as we know today, it also took place simultaneously in the Pacific Ocean, the Indian Ocean, and the Persian Gulf, even reaching Russia via the “Black Sea” (Allen, 2014; Clarence-Smith, 1989; Collins, 2008, and Hunwick, 2008). Undoubtedly, these latter global trajectories of the slave trade have been covered up (*encubierto*) by the preeminence of the Atlantic axis as the conventional horizon of understanding, by the “myth of triangular trade”, as argued pioneeringly by Manuel Zapata Olivella ([1977] 2020 and [1989] 2020).

In our view, racism is a mode of valuation assembled based on images, discourses, and supremacist practices that have operated as a fundamental element for capital

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accumulation in the world system (Quijano, 2014; Balibar and Wallerstein, [1988] 1991). It is anything but a superstructural phenomenon that can be categorized as accessory, or as a mere matter of recognition in politically correct liberal language; rather, it can be said to be constitutive of the expanded circuits of capital accumulation. Because racism was the basis for designing a *global mechanism of super-exploitation*, which was not initially ordered based on the capital-wage relationship but codified through the capital-slavery relationship, resulting in extraordinary profit margins and the establishment of privilege systems that still persist today.

In fact, the existence of the capital-wage relationship in metropolitan industrial centers (Williams [1979] 2010), and in the literate colonial cities (*ciudad letrada*) worldwide, was only possible as a corollary of the capital-slavery relationship in the various peripheries of each specific territory (i.e., in the spectrum of its relative *hinterland*), especially in plantations, mines, and *haciendas*, as well as in a multitude of urban and port trades, among which public infrastructure works stand out. All these jobs were later overcoded based on the capital-wage relationship, without transforming the indelible mark of hierarchies associated with the slave legacies in the colonial, national, and imperial order. In this sense, global capitalism did not appear nor *develop as the liberal overcoming of slavery*, but as a device articulated to this despotic mechanism of population domination and governance, always legitimized by racism.

Consequently, racism and capital are part of the same asymmetric power formation that expresses itself singularly in different historical moments and particular geographical scenarios, as it does not circulate uniformly and undifferentiatedly (Robinson [1983] 2019 and Segato, 2007). This power formation crystallizes in temporalities and heterogeneous spatial distributions involving different regimes of representation of both colonial and republican alterity and ipseity (*ipseidad*). Its concreteness is related to local histories, regional correlations of political forces, social distinction practices, images of whiteness, and situated racialization of bodies, peoples, and landscapes.

For all these reasons, the articulations between racism and capital mobilize a diversity of global, national, and local designs; they also trigger multiple counterpoints of Afro-diasporic liberation practices. These practices include forms of resistance, marooning strategies, intimate sufficiencies (*suficiencias íntimas*), social organization experiences, economic autonomies, sung thoughts, rich oralities, intercultural health matrices, complex spiritualities, insubordinate educational designs, artistic creations, gastronomic diversities, territorial arrangements, political negotiations, and intellectual traditions; for the persons, communities, and peoples who have experienced the alliance between racism and capital firsthand have by no means been passive in the face of despotism, dispossession, and global supremacist control pretensions, but creatively –and from different spheres –have challenged and transgressed both the domination system and the hegemonic government technologies.

It is also worth noting that the power formation that assembles racism and capital was articulated with doctrines produced as official discourses by metropolitan imperial powers and colonial Creole elites (*elites criollas*); this device operated as a *colonial state reason* between the 16th and 19th centuries. These doctrines manifested in black codes, inquisitorial and judicial processes, civilizing rhetoric, and discriminatory stereotypes that mobilized practices of violence legitimized both institutionally and in common sense against racialized and enslaved people; hence, racist cruelty is a modality of political violence, not just a moral issue. Later, between the late 19th and early 20th centuries, state eugenics theories articulated colonial legacies, slave legacies, biological discourses, and biopolitical government technologies to redesign political violence practices again on a planetary scale.

In this historical horizon, the repertoires of violence have been differentiated compared to those exercised against bodies, peoples, and landscapes that represent themselves as expressions of whiteness because the markers and stereotypes attributed to racialized entities usually mobilize –by their perpetrators– the exercise of cruelty and savagery,

based on the most absolute discrimination. Recently, after the fall of the Berlin Wall, the emergence of multiculturalism redesigned symbolic forms associated with population classification based on both identity politics and ethnic exoticism. These neoliberal formulations neglected the discussion, transformation, and historical repair of inequalities experienced as a combined effect of structural, systemic, and multidimensional racism, colonial legacies, and slave legacies, commodifying historically excluded identities.

This had a significant inflection inaugurating a new global moment with the murder of George Floyd, suffocated by police hands on the street (paradoxically this murder was perpetrated on "Africa Day," May 25, 2020), which revived in the global public sphere the images of slave and post-slave cruelty reproduced on digital social networks and stoked at least indignation, insubordination, and protest, refounding on one hand the reaffirmation of anti-black racism, as well as the renewed and publicly legitimized presence of the *Ku Klux Klan* under Donald Trump's government (2017-2021) and, on the other hand, the radical anti-racism led by the Black Lives Matter movement.

Today, while in Latin America and the Caribbean there is a struggle for historical reparations —with minimal results— explicit genocides are taking place in the Mediterranean, Congo, Sudan, and Palestine (another racialized people), while a new *Afro-descendant Decade* is being demanded at the United Nations. However, in the United States, the set of affirmative actions achieved after the massive civil rights mobilizations of the 1950s and 60s is gradually being dismantled. In other words, multiculturalism did not address the historical reparations demanded by different Afro-descendant persons, communities, and peoples, leading to the global staging of political violence that has intensified.

Now, why pose this contemporary problem within the framework of the *Cuadernos del Caribe* Journal? In this issue, we assume the conception of the Caribbean as a meta-archipelago proposed by Antonio Benítez Rojo ([1989] 1998). In other words, it is a

singular territory where the events that occur mobilize global effects (not just on a regional scale); similarly, global designs have local repercussions in the Caribbean, as Juan Bosch pointed out, the Caribbean is an imperial frontier ([1981] 2009). In this sense, it is not defined solely by its geomorphological dimension but is assembled based on a planetary horizon. Consequently, the Caribbean's specters can be found as situated drifts in other territories of the world system; they are fragments that exceed the immediate sphere of the region. Thus, there are Caribbean specters located in different continents and archipelagos worldwide, as well as fragments of other continents and archipelagos present in the Caribbean, tracing what Édouard Glissant called a poetics of relation and a vocation of synthesis ([1981] 2005, [1989] 1998, and [1997] 2006). Addressing racism, political violence, and Afro-diasporic liberation practices from Caribbean studies implies situating the debate in the place of enunciation of both their historical emergence and their convergence and contemporary drifts in the world system.

Therefore, issue 30 of the *Cuadernos del Caribe* Journal of the Institute of Caribbean Studies of the National University of Colombia calls for contributions of research and reflection articles with disciplinary, inter or transdisciplinary, and even undisciplinatory approaches around the relationship between racism, political violence, and Afro-diasporic liberation practices, in which notions such as economy, culture, education, health, gender, territory, society, and arts, among others, are considered transversal in relation to the following problematizing axes:

1. Cartography of Afro-diasporic liberation practices
2. Migrations, exiles, banishments, and global geopolitics
3. Armed conflicts, sociocultural inequalities, and intersectionality
4. Urban segregation and police violence
5. Epistemic violence, multiculturalism, and anti-racist thought

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